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Golden Nuggets: Striking it Rich with Cultural Data

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Museum policy work at the Department of Communications (DOC) has increasingly involved both prospecting for and mining the data on heritage in the Culture Statistics Program (CSP).

This effort has been rewarding, and findings are contributing to a broader understanding of Canadian culture, and to the further development of cultural policy. This article reviews examples showing the contribution which can be made through different approaches to exploring the CSP data.

Gutenberg and beyond

In the past, socio-economic research on culture has often been directed towards analyzing published data or initiating new data collection. Often, however, a problem seen as requiring the collection of new data can in fact be addressed using data that are either underdeveloped or unknown. In many cases where culture managers may despair of information being available, a considerable amount already exists.

One of the secrets to a successful search for information on culture is to recognize that not all data are available in print. Today's technologies provide greatly improved options for striking rich, though unexpected, veins of data and information; they also provide

better means of analysing and disseminating information.

While limited availability of existing data may have been a problem even as late as the early eighties, data are currently much more accessible. An agency such as Statistics Canada has

- more information,
- more detailed information, and
- more timely information in electronic form than can ever be exhibited in print. Access to such information only requires knowing where to go to request it.

For example, through direct communication with the Culture Statistics Program¹, the Bovey Task Force on the Funding of the Arts and the recent federal museums policy review by the Department of Communications were able to get answers to specific questions on the financing of the arts and of museums, and to pursue trends (see Chart 1 on page 2).

Such communication has proven beneficial both to the users and to the collectors of statistics. Discussions

¹ See Appendix 1 of *Challenges and Choices: Federal Policy and Program Proposals for Canadian Museums, Supply and Services Canada, 1988*; and the data and Appendix D of *Funding of the Arts in Canada to the Year 2000, Supply and Services Canada, 1986*.

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about data and specific data needs lead to insights into how to use the statistics better, or how the data could be collected or presented in better ways. Such communication establishes contacts that are especially helpful when ad hoc projects have to be addressed quickly. Obtaining museum expenditure figures to study the potential impacts of the Goods and Services Tax on these institutions is a topical case in point.

Customizing data

Obtaining nationally consistent, comparable data is a challenge facing managers of cultural activities. One study commissioned in 1985 by the federal and provincial ministers

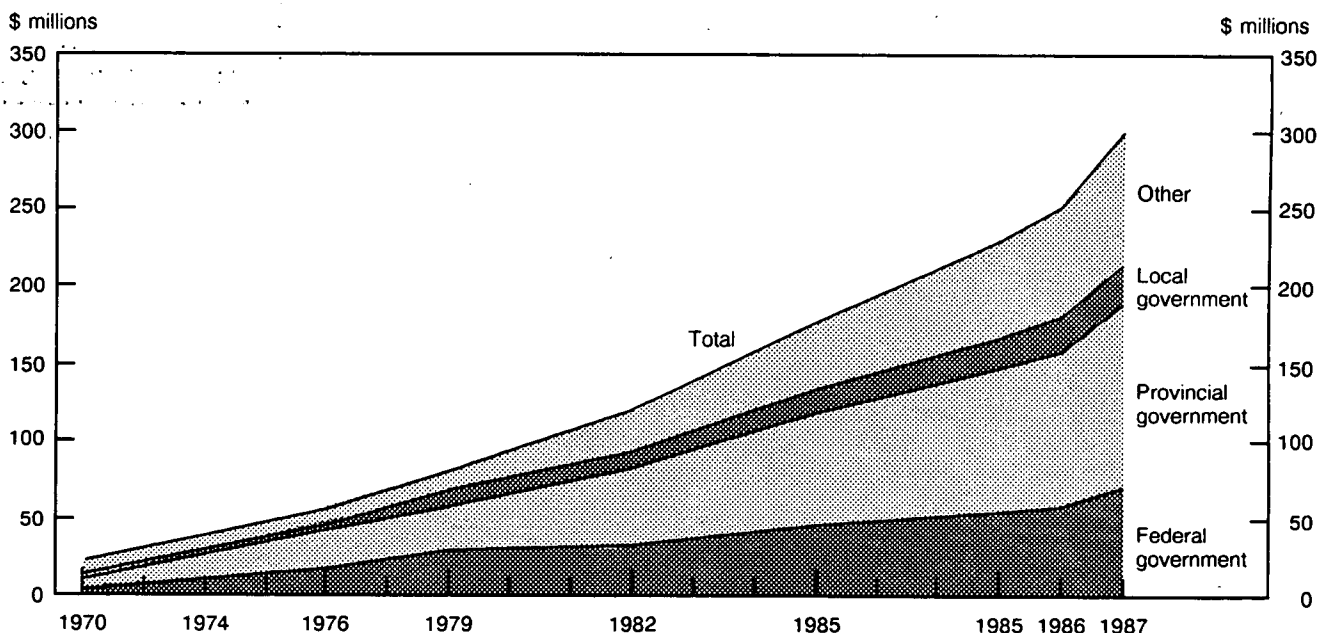
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Figure I

Who pays for museums?

Museums operating revenues by source, 1970 - 1987



responsible for culture addressed this question in some detail, with interesting outcomes for both participants and the Culture Statistics Program. The working group obtained customized data from the

CSP, and augmented it with additional information collected provincially (see Chart 2)².

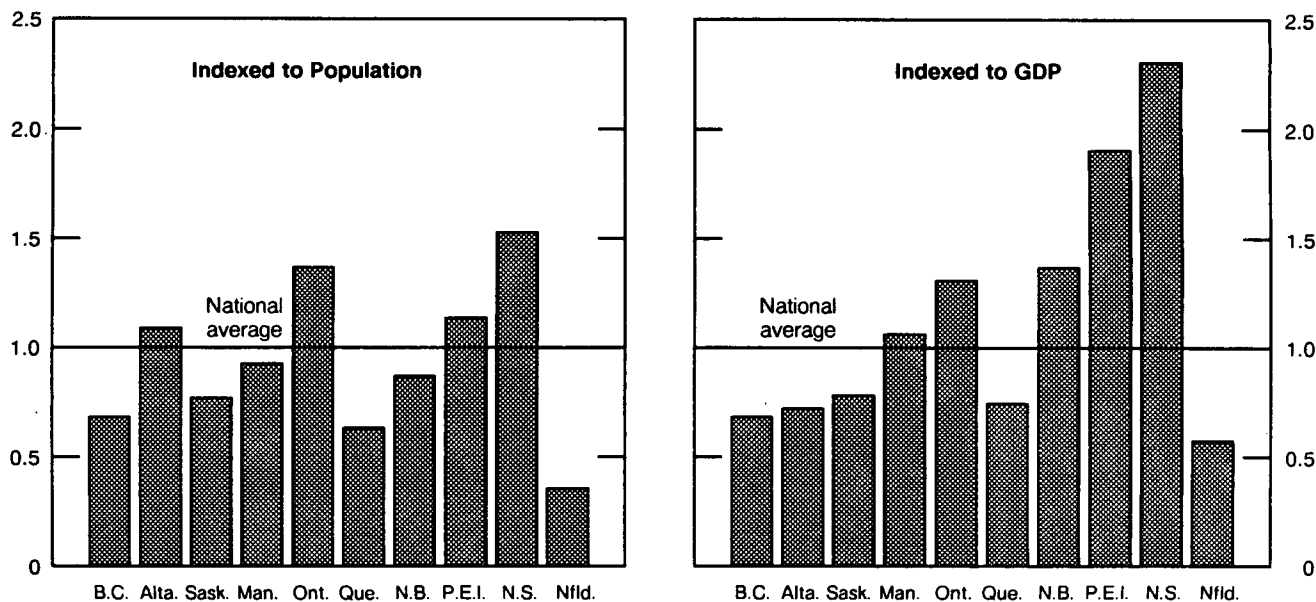
² See *Economic Dimensions of the Culture Sector*, Department of Communications.

This served on the one hand to strengthen existing on-going surveys and increase dialogue with data users, and, on the other, the experience also made users aware that data which might have been seen as limited could indeed be valid and useful.

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Figure II

Heritage Institutions Operating Expenses, 1985



Illuminating the features of Canadian culture

The impact of data can be direct and dramatic. One of the most significant culture statistical studies undertaken was the collection of data on Canadians' leisure activity in the late seventies. These showed the, as then, little recognized fact that participation in cultural activities was as widespread as participation in sports. In recognition of this fact, a substantial share of lottery funds (now reaching over one billion dollars annually) has been allocated to the arts.

At a less dramatic level, the Department of Communications is working to make basic data available to its community. The Culture Statistics Program collects a great deal of culture data, but does not publish all of it. Department of Communications is taking Statistics Canada data on specific groupings of museums and providing provincial profiles as background for discussion with the provinces, distributing highlights through newsletters of museums associations, and producing a "factsheet" on museums to spread basic statistical knowledge. (A current example is included with this issue of Focus on Culture).

For statistics on culture, the Culture Statistics Program is the first, but not the sole source. Calling upon Revenue Canada publications, or private data bases, such as those of the Council for Business and the Arts, are ways to enhance the statistical picture. Special concerns can be effectively addressed with one-time studies, such as that of the museums labour market just completed by the Canadian Museums Association for the Department of Communications (providing in-depth information on topics not covered by the Census). All of these contribute to illuminating features of culture activity in Canada, and allow for more effective planning and development of the programs designed to support that activity.

Working the mother lode

The use of data is not without its pitfalls. In the first place, good surveys do take time and they do need to cover completed fiscal years.³ Once the data are collected, resources and expertise are necessary to apply them (numbers do not speak for themselves!). While all the data wanted may not be available, the biggest potential lies in committing resources to make better use of what exists, rather than collecting more information.

Given this commitment, there is a wealth of information accessible which can be put to good use.

Since the Culture Statistics Program came into being in the early seventies, much has been accomplished.

³ *International comparisons show Canada's data to be among the most timely.*

Considerable data exist, and exist historically; many one-time studies, of artists, of economic impacts, etc., have been done; more and better research is being seen – the task force on broadcasting policy is a major example. The necessity and benefits of integrating culture statistics into the consideration of more and more issues, including items such as free trade and the GST, has been recognised. Some of the above examples should stimulate potential users to discover some data for themselves, and in so doing discover more about their field.

The first step in making better use of existing cultural data is to contact the Culture Statistics Program. Statistics Canada staff is always ready to discuss your needs and to help you mine the existing data bases to obtain the information you need. Good digging. □

Canadian Families: Staying Home with the VCR?

by Renée Langlois, Data Integration Analyst

The average family in Canada spent more money on purchasing VCRs and renting video-tapes in 1986 than on going to the movies.

Overall, spending on cultural items by the average Canadian family reached \$889 in 1986, a 15% increase in constant dollars over similar spending in 1978. This compares favourably with constant dollar increases of 3% in total current expenditures. Cultural items examined for purposes of this study include expenditures on home entertainment equipment, admissions to events such as movies, concerts, plays and heritage institutions, spending on reading material for non-educational purposes and other expenses (arts and crafts material, musical instruments and works of art).

In 1978, 2.3% of a family's total current spending was on cultural goods and services. By 1986, this had increased to 2.5% of total spending.

The survey year in between, 1982, showed culture earning 2.1% of total family expenditures, perhaps as a result of the difficult economic times many families were experiencing then. In constant 1986 dollars, cultural spending reached \$775 per average family in 1978, dipped to \$679 in 1982 only to bounce back to \$889 in 1986.

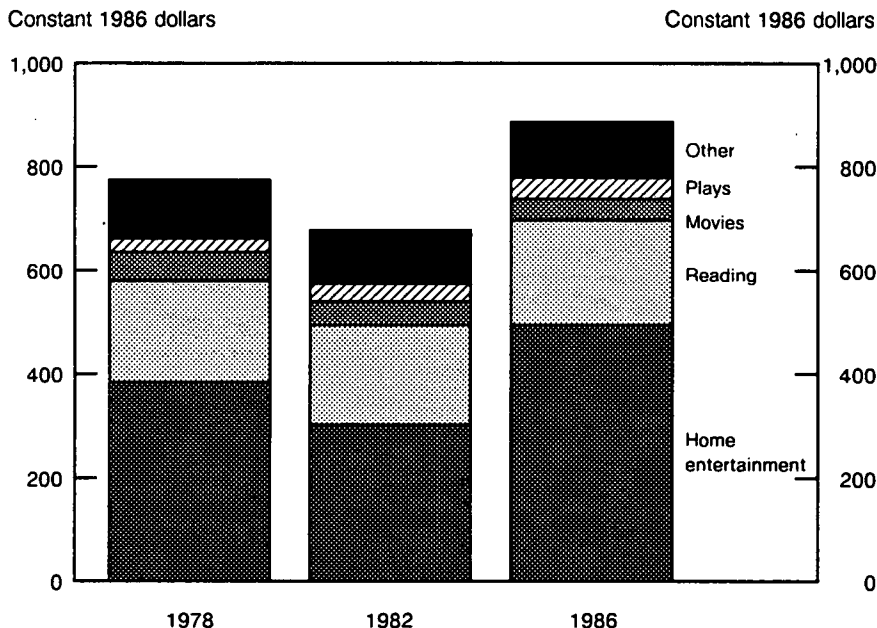
In all three years, home entertainment took the lion's share of all expenditures on cultural items, shifting from 50% in 1978, to 45% in 1982 and back up to 55% in 1986. This includes items such as purchases of audio equipment, television and video components, records, tapes, compact discs, cablevision and video-tape rentals. (See Figure III on page 4).

Expenditures on home entertainment averaged \$492 per family in 1986, an increase of 62% over 1982

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Figure III

Average Family Expenditures on Culture, 1978, 1982 and 1986



although data from 1987 indicate that this downward trend might have bottomed out.

While it seems Canadians are spending less on going out to the movies, they are spending more money to attend plays and live concerts. Spending on admissions to plays and concerts increased by 56% in constant dollars between 1978 and 1986. In fact, average per family expenditures on plays and concerts showed the second largest increase of all cultural items, after expenditures on cablevision. Families in all provinces reported increased spending on the performing arts; from a 26% increase in Quebec to a 138% in Prince Edward Island. Not only is more of the family budget being diverted to the performing arts, more families are incurring this category of expense: 39% of families in 1986 compared to 28% in 1978.

expenditures. As might be expected, the virtual explosion in video technology which occurred during the early eighties is largely responsible for this increase. Purchases of VCRs had been reported by fewer than 3% of families in 1982; by 1986, more than 11% of families reported such a purchase during the year. Average per family expenditures on purchasing VCRs reached \$67. What's more, Statistics Canada's Household Facilities and Equipment Survey reports that by 1988, 52% of Canadian households owned a VCR, compared to only 12% in 1984.

By 1986, families reported spending an average \$41 per family on video-tape rentals. The participation rate in this activity reached 42% of families. For its part, cablevision accounted for expenditures of \$104 for the average family in 1986, up 85% from 1978 levels, in constant dollars.

With so many Canadians having access to VCR-equipped television sets, is television viewing on the rise? The Culture Statistics Program's Television Viewing Data Bank reveals that average weekly viewing time between 1980 and 1987 varied only slightly around 24 hours, and reached

23.5 hours per week in 1988. Since the introduction of VCRs on the market then, it seems Canadians have not increased their television viewing; more likely, the viewing patterns have changed. In fact, Pay T.V. and VCRs now account for 6% of viewing time, or about 1 hour and 25 minutes per week.

We may wonder what effect, if any, the use of VCRs is having on excursions to the cinema. Survey data reveal a decrease of 28% between movie admissions expenditures in 1978 (an average of \$57 per family) and in 1986 (\$41 per family). Families in New Brunswick spent the least, \$24, on going out to the movies, but at the same time spent the most (\$53) on video-tape rentals. If we look at expenditures for only those families reporting going out to the movies, average spending has still dropped by 19% in constant dollars. In addition, the national participation rate in movie attendance has dropped from 59% of families to 52% in the same time span. The Culture Statistics Program's Survey of Cinemas and Drive-ins reports similar trends in paid admissions: 1986 levels were down by 18% from 1978 levels,

As a point of comparison, expenditures on admissions to live sports events have shown no change between 1978 and 1986, and at \$26 per family, are below the spending levels on performing arts. Interestingly, this phenomenon is not an exclusively Canadian one. The National Endowment for the Arts, in its Research Division Note #32 (December 1989), reports that per capita expenditures on sports events in the U.S.A. have been surpassed by expenditures on the performing arts from 1985 to 1988 (latest data available).

Spending on reading material (excluding educational material) reveals differing patterns depending on the type of book. Families are shifting their spending from hardcover books, showing an 18% decrease between 1978 and 1986, to paperbacks, which increased by 13% over the period. In 1986, the average Canadian family spent \$28 on hardcover books and \$34 on paperbacks. Expenditures on magazines rose by 19%. Whereas Quebec families reported by far the highest

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expenses on reading material in 1978 (\$222 per family), their spending in this area had dropped by 13% by 1986. All other provinces showed increasing spending patterns on reading material.

These figures have been extracted from Statistics Canada's Family Expenditure Survey, which has been conducted approximately every two years since 1953. Detailed questionnaires are sent to a sample of Canadian families to obtain information on their household expenditures during the year. Items

covered include everything from food, shelter, clothing, health care, child care, furnishings and education to reading material and admissions to museums. Although most surveys covered only selected cities in Canada, those of 1978, 1982 and 1986 were conducted in all provinces and therefore can provide information at the national and provincial levels. By selecting certain items which reflect "cultural" goods and services, researchers using the Family Expenditure Survey can access a

veritable gold mine of information about cultural consumption patterns in Canada.

For purposes of this study of expenditures on culture, a number of items were extracted from the files of the 1978, 1982 and 1986 national surveys. All figures were expressed as constant 1986 dollars. The next Family Expenditure Survey, conducted by the Household Surveys Division, will cover expenditures incurred during 1990 in selected cities only. The next national survey is scheduled to cover the year 1992. □

Public Libraries: How They Grew

by Thomas Fitzpatrick, Project Manager, Public Libraries Survey

Inflation over the last decade has taken a toll on the financial position of public libraries. Total operating revenues and expenditures have grown substantially over the last decade, up 11% and 128% respectively. However, when expressed in 1979 based constant dollars, both revenues and expenditures have actually declined in real terms.

Indeed the level of funding of public libraries has decreased steadily since

1981, with the exception of 1984. Operating expenses also declined, although less rapidly, leading to the near elimination of the operating surplus by the 1987-88 survey year, as illustrated in Figure IV.

Local and provincial governments have been and continue to be the major sources of funding for public libraries, accounting for over 94% of total operating revenues in 1987-88. Local government is the predominant source of funding in the provinces of

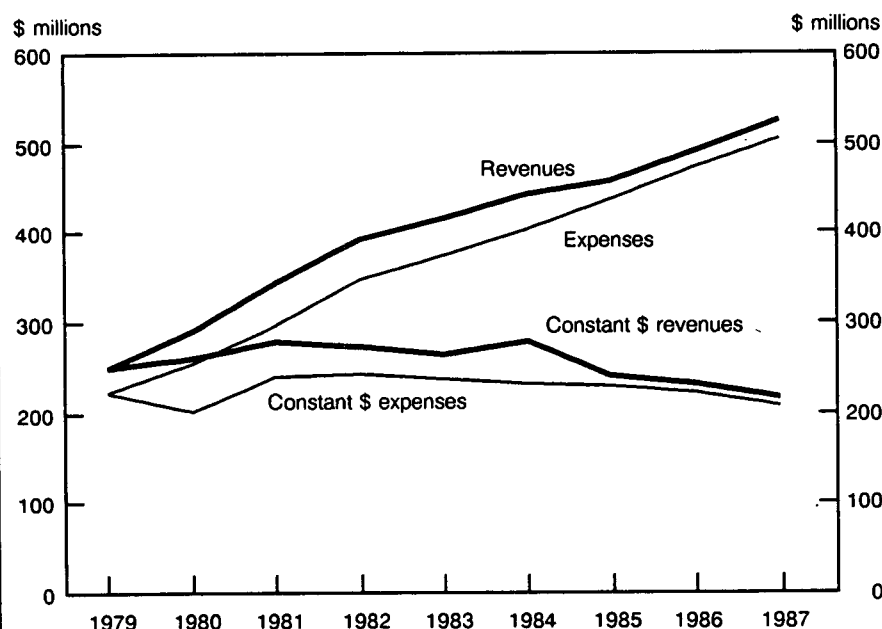
Ontario and Quebec as well as the western provinces (a high of 85% in Ontario and a low of 68% in Saskatchewan). The reverse is the case in the Atlantic Provinces which depend primarily on provincial funding for their operating revenues.

On the expenditure side, personnel represented 78% of total operating expenses in 1987-88. This is a significant increase from 1979-80, when personnel accounted for 63% of total operating expenditures.

In constant dollars, expenditures on personnel fluctuated over the decade, rising from \$138 million in 1979 to a high of \$168 million in 1983, to the current low of \$128 million. This fact is surprising, considering that the number of persons employed by public libraries rose steadily from 10,456 in 1979 to 12,287 in 1987-88. It is interesting to note that minor structural changes in personnel type occurred over the decade: support personnel formed 62% of total employees in 1987-88 compared to 56% in 1979, whereas library technicians dropped from 23% to 18%; professional librarians remained unchanged at 20% of total library personnel.

The second largest expenditure item in 1987-88 was book purchases at 14% of operating expenditures, down from 16% in 1979. Constant dollar expenditures on bookstock show consistent declines, going from 31.4 million in 1979-80 to 23.4 million in 1987-88. This situation is reflected in the fact that acquisitions of print material have held steady at 3.9 million titles since 1984. □

Figure IV
Public Libraries 1979/80 - 1987/88
Total Operating Revenues and Expenses



Breaking Ground for Special Surveys

by Kathryn Williams, Cultural Industries Section Chief

The Culture Statistics Program has undertaken three new surveys to provide a more detailed look at film producers, film distributors and film services in Ontario. These surveys, which supplement data already being collected, were designed, tested and carried out over a seven month period in 1989 and 1990.

Why the surveys were conducted

The Culture Statistics Program agreed to conduct these surveys for a number of reasons:

- To provide the client NGL Consulting Ltd. (on a cost-recovery basis), with the data needed to conduct a comprehensive socio-economic impact study for the Ontario Film Development Corporation. The Culture Statistics Program does not normally collect data at the level of detail required for this study.
- To lessen the burden to Ontario companies in completing questionnaires. Without Statistics Canada's involvement NGL Consulting Ltd. would have had to duplicate the surveys already conducted by Statistics Canada in addition to the supplementary surveys.
- To obtain information about Ontario companies which were not on the existing mailing list for the surveys. New sources of information for the mailing lists are always welcome and help ensure that complete coverage is attained.
- To test some additional questions for inclusion in the future on three of the four existing questionnaires on the film sector.

What was collected

Three supplementary questionnaires were designed in conjunction with NGL Consulting Ltd. and an Advisory Board for the study which included the Ontario Film Development

Corporation, the Canadian Film and Television Association, and the Association of Canadian Film and Television Producers. They were designed to obtain information about:

1. Ontario companies involved in film, video and audio-visual production,
2. Ontario companies involved in film, video and audio-visual distribution and videocassette wholesaling,
3. Ontario companies involved in motion picture laboratory operations and production and post-production services.

These questionnaires requested more detailed breakdowns of existing data on employment, revenue, expenses, clients, sources of financing, products, etc. These breakdowns included gender data for employees, U.S. client information, location of expenditures, budget information for productions, expenditures on advertising, etc. The companies were asked to provide data for their fiscal year ending between April 1, 1988 and March 31, 1989.

Since the supplementary questionnaires followed the existing surveys very closely, it was possible for the Culture Statistics Program to test and finalize the questionnaires very quickly.

How the surveys were conducted

Due to time constraints, it was decided that, of the 443 eligible Ontario companies, 190 (making up 90% of the total revenue for each existing survey) would be included in the supplementary surveys. NGL Consulting Ltd. identified only 10 companies which had not been included on the mailing list for the existing surveys.

In December, we contacted each company by telephone to explain the need for the supplementary surveys and to obtain their cooperation in completing the appropriate questionnaire. Questionnaires were mailed out and companies who did not respond by mail were followed up by telephone in an effort to obtain their data.

It was possible to dedicate one person full time to the collection, edit and capture of the data. This meant

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Focus on Data

Acquisitions by public libraries, 1987-88	3.9 million titles
Average attendance per performance, 1987-88:	
theatre companies	273
music companies	1,190
Municipal government spending on culture, 1987-88	\$898.2 million
Attendance at nature parks, 1987-88	49.8 million
Percentage of television viewing devoted to Canadian programmes, fall 1988	38%
Participation rate at regular motion picture theatres, 1987-88	3.2 times/year per person
Sale and rental revenue from film and video productions, 1988-89:	
- Canadian-controlled videocassette wholesalers	\$159 million
- Foreign-controlled videocassette wholesalers	\$4 million
Average single copy price of Canadian periodicals, 1987-88	\$4.11
Net sales of books published in Canada, 1987-88	\$685 million
Market share of record sales, 1988-89	
vinyl albums	22%
pre-recorded tapes	52%
compact discs	26%

we were able to release the data from the supplementary surveys in March, a much shorter time frame than is possible for the larger regular annual surveys conducted by the Culture Statistics Program.

The client received aggregate tabulations which amalgamated the data from the regular annual surveys with those of the supplements. These tabulations do not divulge information relating to any identifiable business.

For more information

These supplementary surveys show that it is possible to collect data from select groups on an ad hoc basis over a relatively short time frame. It is important to note that such surveys demand extraordinary coordination and must avoid increasing respondent burden.

If you would like further information about commissioning special surveys from the Culture Statistics Program or would like to obtain data from the supplementary surveys, please do not hesitate to contact us. ☐

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New Publications

87-204	Film and Video in Canada, 1987-88
87-208	Television Viewing in Canada, 1988

Still Available

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87-203	Periodical Publishing, 1987-88
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87-206	Government Expenditures on Culture in Canada, 1987-88
87-207	Heritage Institutions, 1986-87
87-209	Performing Arts, 1987
87-210	Book Publishing in Canada, 1987-88
87-517	Government Expenditures on Culture in Canada, 1982-83 to 1986-87

Most Recent Data Available

Sound Recording: 1988-89
Periodical Publishing: 1987-88
Film and Video Producers: 1988-89
Film and Video Distributors: 1988-89
Film Laboratories and Post-production Services: 1988-89
Motion Picture Theatres: 1988-89
Public Libraries: 1987-88
Government Expenditures on Culture: 1988-89
Heritage Institutions: 1987-88
Television Viewing: 1988
Performing Arts Companies: 1987-88
Book Publishing: 1988-89

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