

The Economic Impact of Archives: Surveys of Users of Government Archives in Canada and the United States

Elizabeth Yakel, Wendy Duff, Helen Tibbo, Adam Kriesberg, and Amber Cushing

Abstract

Economic impact analyses have not been widely conducted in archives. As a result, the best methodological approach to apply to archives is unknown. This article presents results from two parallel surveys on the economic impact of government archives (state, provincial, territorial, county, and municipal) in the United States and Canada that used indirect measures. It also discusses methodological issues surrounding the measurement of economic impact in archives, libraries, and museums. Although the findings indicate that government archives do support local economies by bringing people into a region or city for research, this impact is moderate. The analyses point to the importance of considering other types of impact, such as social and cultural, alongside economic impact as equally important measures of archives' role in society. The conclusions discuss these findings as well as the need for additional research on direct measures of economic impact and other types of impact to fully understand how archives contribute to their local economies.

Economic impact analyses have not been widely conducted in archives.¹ Those that have been done are generally singular, with little ability to compare measures across organizations. According to Caroline Pung,

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¹ David Carmichael, "Heritage Tourism Is a Peach in Georgia," *Archival Outlook* (July/August 2009), 6 and Association of King County Historical Organizations (AKCHO), *The Impact of Historical Organizations in King County Public Benefit Survey Results* (Seattle, Wash.: AKCHO, 2004).

Ann Clarke, and Laurie Patten, archives and libraries traditionally measure impact through interviews and case studies.² While these qualitative measures “tell stories,” they do not produce the quantitative data traditionally found in discussions of economic impact. According to Caroline Wavell, Graeme Baxter, Ian Johnson, and Dorothy Williams, “research into the social, learning and economic impact of the archive domain should be treated as a priority.”³ In the United States, Bruce Dearstyne echoes this call to “demonstrate the value of archival records as an economic resource, including travel by outsiders to use them.”⁴

Archives have long been interested in measuring their worth, yet few researchers have taken up this call. Thus, demonstrations of archives’ economic value remain elusive. In this article, we follow Wavell et al.’s call and quantitatively assess archives’ impact on local economies. Our major research question is “Do archives have an indirect economic impact on the local economy?” As a corollary, we also ask, “What other types of impact should archives assess when measuring their impact?” This article presents results of a large-scale research project on the economic impact of government archives (state, provincial, territorial, county, and municipal) in the United States and Canada conducted in two phases in 2009 and 2010. Using indirect measures of economic impact, our study generated 2,534 responses from 51 states/provinces/territories, 5 counties (U.S. only), and 9 cities. We find that government archives support local economies by bringing people into a region or city for research. However, our discoveries are much more nuanced. At the core of our discussion is a central concern over the appropriateness of indirect measures for archives. In addition to economic impact, we measured social impact and found overwhelming support by researchers for the archives in our sample. This study points to the need for follow-up research on economic impact and archives as well as other types of impact to fully understand how archives contribute to their local economies.

² Caroline Pung, Ann Clarke, and Laurie Patten, “Measuring the Economic Impact of the British Library,” *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 10, no. 1 (2004): 79–102.

³ Caroline Wavell, Graeme Baxter, Ian Johnson, and Dorothy Williams, *Impact Evaluation of Museums, Archives and Libraries: Available Evidence Report* (Aberdeen, U.K.: Robert Gordon University, 2002), 90.

⁴ Bruce Dearstyne, “Raising Awareness and Strengthening Advocacy: Report to the Local Government Archives Task Force of the Council of State Archivists” (2007), 27, Council of State Archivists, www.statearchivists.org/lga/documents/reports/Dearstyne-report.doc, accessed 28 February 2012.

Literature Review

Measuring Economic Impact

Economic impact is measured in two distinct ways: analysis of direct and indirect benefits. Direct benefits include direct expenditures for goods and services, such as an institution's spending, income, and employment, all of which affect a local economy. An archives' direct benefit would be the monetary value of a patron's use of the archival services. For example, a developer may locate a deed documenting an easement; on the open market the cost of buying the easement would be millions of dollars. In public institutions, such as public libraries, direct benefit studies are often framed in terms of return on investment. For example, for every \$1 in taxes paid, a library patron gets \$5 in services in terms of free Internet access or DVDs on loan.

Indirect benefits are generated through transactions outside the archives and in the local economy. For example, an archives could benefit local businesses when a patron visits a geographic location specifically to use the archival materials, but also eats lunch at a nearby restaurant or stays in a local hotel. Indirect benefits are generally harder to discern than direct benefits, but economic impact analysis can measure both indirect and direct benefits, and indirect benefits may be greater than direct benefits in many cases. This type of metric is often used to boost local enthusiasm for attracting major sporting events during which attendees stay in hotels and spend money on food, drink, taxis, and souvenirs. Countries vie to host the Olympic Games, not just for the honor but also for the revenue they hope the games will generate. Over time, direct and indirect benefits can lead to induced benefits: the process by which income levels in a local area rise due to the personal income spent there as a result of tourism.

Direct Benefits Studies

The British Library sponsored a well-known study of direct economic impact. Between August and October 2003, the library employed a consulting firm to develop quantitative measures of economic impact to demonstrate accountability to government and taxpayers, show value added to the nation, provide a mandate for continued support, focus on external benefits, and develop a customer-led approach. This study used a consumer surplus methodology (a tool to measure economic welfare) to obtain data. When market information is not available, the consumer surplus method uses contingent valuation, which can be used to obtain data on both direct and

indirect benefits. It relies on user surveys to obtain data on preferences and behavioral change.⁵

The British Library conducted three surveys: of users of the library's reading rooms, of users of the library's remote document supply and bibliographic services, and of the general public who do not use the library's services. In each survey, users and nonusers were asked questions related to the value of the library's services.⁶ The British Library obtained information about the amount of money respondents would be willing to pay for library services and whether respondents would be willing to give up a library service that they had previously used. The economic impact analysis discovered that both users and nonusers all over the country are willing to pay, on average, more than they are currently paying through taxes to use library services. The library also found that its direct and indirect benefits generates value worth 4.4 times its annual government funding.

Public libraries in the United States widely use measures of economic impact. These studies document the market value of public libraries where the "value of each type of library service to a library user is measured in terms of what it would cost users to buy the same services in an open marketplace."⁷ A number of these studies have been done by combining unobtrusive measures from the library (circulation statistics, logs from computer usage) to create a market valuation of services, surveys of patrons to assess contingent value of the services, and public tax data.⁸

While direct measures may appear to be more straightforward than indirect, they are not. Market valuation means creating actual values for services. However, public libraries have multiple possible means of valuation. An examination of reference services is revealing. South Carolina used a multiplier based on half of the median hourly wage (\$12), applied this to the number of reference transactions, and figured an average of 30 minutes per transaction.⁹ Wisconsin selected the average hourly wage of their librarians (\$23) as the multiplier and figured in the number of reference questions, assuming 15 minutes per transaction.¹⁰ Suffolk County, New York, adopted the Google

⁵ Pung et al., "Measuring the Economic Impact of the British Library."

⁶ Pung et al., "Measuring the Economic Impact of the British Library."

⁷ NorthStar Economics, Inc., *The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries to the Economy of Wisconsin* (2008), 8, <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/pdf/wilibraryimpact.pdf>, accessed 29 February 2012.

⁸ For links to many of these recent studies, see "The Economic Impact of Public Libraries," Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, <http://dpi.wi.gov/pld/econimpact.html>, accessed 29 February 2012.

⁹ Daniel D. Baron, Robert V. Williams, Stephen Bajjaly, Jennifer Arns, and Steven Wilson, *South Carolina Public Library Economic Impact Study* (Columbia, S.C.: School of Library and Information Science, 2005), 59, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/SCEIS/final%20report%2026%20january.pdf>, accessed 29 February 2012.

¹⁰ NorthStar Economics, Inc., *The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries*, 25.

Answers rate of \$29.¹¹ Other metrics in these studies reveal similar inconsistencies and a lack of consensus on measurement.

The public library economic impact studies also use contingent valuation that bases value on individual perceptions. Public library users are surveyed to determine how much value they assign to various services. The authors of the Colorado Public Library economic impact study argue that using this method,

users are responding more holistically, based on a complete library experience, and—perhaps more pointedly—a specific purpose and schedule. As the saying goes, “time is money,” and the reports of individual study participants suggest that a great deal of a library’s value in the eyes of many lies in the added value of having large collections of resources, computers and databases, the help of reference and other expert staff, and programming together in one place. Each of these resources can, and often does, reinforce the value of others, both in the content of the resulting service and in the time saved for users. . . . This approach acknowledges that the value of a library is quite likely greater than the sum of the value of its individual resources and services.¹²

Although most research on economic impact in the arts sector uses indirect measures, Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) is notable for both taking a longitudinal approach and using direct measures.¹³ The study, first conducted in 1997 and again in 2000, surveyed 441 nonprofit arts organizations in Oregon. Buehler and Trapp found that the arts sector in Oregon grew from 1997 to 2000, directly contributing more than \$100.2 million to the economy in 2000 through such factors as construction and employment. Interestingly, the authors also factored in volunteers and in-kind donations, which totaled \$13.2 million or 13.0% of the “total collective annual budgets for nonprofit arts organizations in Oregon.”¹⁴ The Association of King County (Washington) Historical Organizations (AKCHO) conducted a similar survey. This study included archives among the other cultural attractions, museums, and heritage sites and calculated that \$8,633,381 went directly into the county’s economy through staff salaries, and an additional \$662,897 was collected in sales taxes associated with site visits.¹⁵

¹¹ Pearl M. Kamer, *Placing an Economic Value on the Services of Public Libraries in Suffolk County, New York* (June 2005), 5, <http://scls.suffolk.lib.ny.us/pdf/librarystudy.pdf>, accessed 29 February 2012.

¹² Nicolle Steffen, Zeth Lietzau, Keith Curry Lance, Amanda Rybin, and Carla Molliconi, *Public Libraries—A Wise Investment: A Return on Investment Study of Colorado Libraries* (March 2009), 10, Library Research Services, http://www.lrs.org/documents/closer_look/roi.pdf, accessed 29 February 2012.

¹³ Daniel Buehler and Erin Trapp, *The Economic Impact of Oregon’s Nonprofit Arts Sector* (Denver: Western States Arts Federation, 2001), <http://www.oregonartscommission.org/sites/www.oregonartscommission.org/files/westaf.pdf>, accessed 29 February 2012.

¹⁴ Buehler and Trapp, *The Economic Impact of Oregon’s Nonprofit Arts Sector*, 3.

¹⁵ AKCHO, *The Impact of Historical Organizations in King County Public Benefit Survey Results*.

While little has been done specifically with direct benefit studies in archives, the AKCHO study demonstrates how archives, particularly those attached to historic sites, might benefit. Direct benefit studies are also popular because direct benefits are seen as having a multiplier effect if individuals and businesses reinvest moneys gained from selling goods and services.

Indirect Benefits Studies

While direct benefit studies focus on the value of an institution's services, indirect benefit studies attempt to demonstrate the impact of an institution on other parts of the local economy. This section reviews some of the indirect benefit studies, beginning briefly with public libraries, which make minimal use of this measurement technique, and then focusing on cultural organizations, from museums to historic sites, which frequently employ this method. We end by discussing the few available economic impact studies of archival institutions that also used this approach.

The economic impact studies in public libraries make minimal use of indirect measures; however, some studies, such as those in Colorado and Wisconsin, and at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, all asked patrons what other activities and errands they combined with a library visit.¹⁶ Only Wisconsin reported these data, finding that "survey respondents are nearly as likely to stop at the library on their way to or from another appointment or errand (72.0%) as they are to go out for the express purpose of visiting the library (79.2%)."¹⁷ NorthStar Economics (the authors of the Wisconsin study) went on to note that, on average, respondents spend an additional \$24.63 on activities they otherwise would not have done had they not gone to the library.¹⁸ In public libraries in the United Kingdom, Richard Proctor, Bob Usherwood, and Gill Sobczyk also found that 23.0% of library-related transactions would not have occurred if the library did not exist.¹⁹ This type of indirect measure is often referred to as "halo spending."

In a 2005 review of museum data and collections, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) found that in reaction to financial challenges,

¹⁶ See Steffen et al., *Public Libraries—A Wise Investment*; NorthStar Economics, Inc., *The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries*; and Carnegie Mellon Center for Economic Development (CED), *Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh: Community Impact and Benefits* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: Carnegie Mellon University Center for Economic Development and Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, 2006), <http://www.clpgh.org/about/economicimpact/CLPCommunityImpactFinalReport.pdf>, accessed 29 February 2012.

¹⁷ NorthStar Economics, Inc. *The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries*, 44.

¹⁸ NorthStar Economics, Inc. *The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries*, 44.

¹⁹ Richard Proctor, Bob Usherwood, and Gill Sobczyk, "What Happens When a Public Library Service Closes Down?," *Library Management* 18, no. 1 (1997): 59–64.

more museums are conducting economic impact studies.²⁰ The Americans for the Arts (AFA) conducted some of the most notable studies. While these studies are useful for all areas of the arts, they tend to focus on the arts in general, not on museums or cultural heritage sites in particular. In the most recent national survey in the Arts and Economic Prosperity series, Robert Lynch found greater indirect (\$103.1 billion) than direct economic impact (\$63.1 billion).²¹ The AFA website also features an economic impact calculator.²²

The National Park Service regularly carries out studies of cultural heritage tourism and its effect on the local economy. Daniel J. Stynes authored a recent study of parks throughout the United States and found that “visitors staying outside the park in motels, hotels, cabins and bed and breakfasts accounted for 56.0% of the total spending. Half of the spending was for lodging and meals, 19.0% for gas and local transportation, 10.0% for amusements, 8.0% for groceries, and 13.0% for other retail purchases.”²³ These figures exclude admission fees.

Michele Cegielski, Ben Janeczko, Trevor Mules, and Josette Wells conducted an economic impact study comparing cultural heritage tourism in three Australian mining towns.²⁴ In consultation with the Australian Heritage Commission, the researchers chose three towns and conducted face-to-face interviews to learn about visitors’ motivations for visiting, behavior, and spending habits, and then used these data to measure impact on the region surrounding each of these towns. As in archives, a majority of visitors to all these sites are day-trippers who on average spend between 48 and 61 Australian dollars per group at the three sites. It is unclear whether this figure includes the admission fees to the sites.

Turning to archives, Sarah Horton and Jacqueline Spence developed a set of taxonomies for assessing use and impact of archival resources.²⁵ Using a

²⁰ Carole Wharton and Todd DeBruin, *Museum Data Collection Report and Analysis*. (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Museum and Library Services, 2005).

²¹ Robert L. Lynch, *Arts and Economic Prosperity III: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences* (Americans for the Arts, 2005), http://artsusa.org/pdf/information_services/research/services/economic_impact/aepiii/national_report.pdf, accessed 29 February 2012.

²² Americans for the Arts, Arts and Economic Prosperity Calculator, http://www.americansforthearts.org/information_services/research/services/economic_impact/aepiii_calculator.html, accessed 29 February 2012.

²³ Daniel J. Stynes, *Economic Benefits to Local Communities from National Park Visitation and Payroll, 2010*, National Park Service, Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/EQD/NRR—2011/481 (Fort Collins, Colo.: National Park Service, 2011), 3.

²⁴ Michele Cegielski, Ben Janeczko, Trevor Mules, and Josette Wells, *Economic Value of Tourism to Places of Cultural Heritage Significance: A Case Study of Three Towns with Mining Heritage* (Canberra, Aus.: University of Canberra, 2000).

²⁵ Sarah Horton and Jacqueline Spence, “Scoping the Economic and Social Impact of Archives” (Yorkshire, U.K.: MLA, March 2006).

broad definition of economic impact, the authors identified numerous impacts, direct and indirect, on both the supply and demand sides. However, as noted, many involved some degree of social or educational impact in addition to economic benefit, complicating discrete evaluation methods. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), in conjunction with NEF Consulting, sought to quantify social benefits and calculate a social return on investment (SROI).²⁶ This type of indirect benefit study supplements more traditional economic impact analysis, measuring outcomes and impacts that lie outside the purview of other methods.

Of the available indirect benefits studies, only the Public Services Quality Group of the National Council on Archives (PSQG) in the United Kingdom has specifically measured the broad economic impact of archives since 2002.²⁷ The most recent PSQG survey (2011) reports data from 125 records offices and 11,051 questionnaires. The survey asked visitors to archives about their reason for visiting, experience at the archival institution, mode of travel, type of lodging, and spending habits in conjunction with their visit to the records office. Overall, 35.0% of the respondents used local services in conjunction with their archives visit, a number that is comparable with the 2007 and 2009 surveys.²⁸

While no study in the United States is as broad as the PSQG's, David Carmichael presented findings from 2003 and 2005 surveys of out-of-state visitors to archival institutions in the state of Georgia, arguing that these visits added \$1 million to the economy there.²⁹ His work received press coverage, attention from the state tourism agency, and attention from county tourism agencies.

Economic impact analysis has great potential to help archival institutions understand their effects on the local economy and to think more holistically about their place in a local ecology of governmental agencies, cultural heritage institutions, and/or research institutions. Using direct or indirect benefit methods, archival institutions can demonstrate their financial benefits to a local economy and better understand usage patterns and potential relationships with like organizations. While few archival examples of economic impact analyses in the United States exist, we build on the Georgia survey and the PSQG as useful models in our study of the economic impact of city, county, and state/provincial archival institutions in the United States and Canada.

²⁶ Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and NEF Consulting, "Proving Value and Improving Practice: A Discussion about Social Return on Investment (SROI)" (Yorkshire, U.K.: MLA, May 2009).

²⁷ For links to the entire series, see Archives and Records Association, "Other Useful Publications," <http://www.archives.org.uk/publications/other-useful-publications.html>, accessed 29 February 2012.

²⁸ Public Services Quality Group of the National Council on Archives, ed., *Survey of Visitors to UK Archives 2011*, 62 and 185, Archives and Records Association, "Other Useful Publications," <http://www.archives.org.uk/publications/other-useful-publications.html>, accessed 29 February 2012.

²⁹ Carmichael, "Heritage Tourism Is a Peach in Georgia," 6.

Methodology

As outlined in the literature review, although a few archives have participated in economic impact studies, no study has explored the economic impact of archives nationally nor have specific measures of economic impact been assessed for archives. Since the Georgia and PSQG surveys provide the closest models for our research, we selected indirect measures for this initial survey. We also saw this as a means of assessing the benefits and problems with this approach to economic impact evaluation.

Survey Development

In developing the survey, we examined the literature on direct and indirect economic impact and examined other surveys that asked similar research questions. We based the Economic Impact questionnaire on three previous instruments: the PSQG *Survey of Visitors to UK Archives*,³⁰ a survey developed by Carmichael³¹ for the Georgia Archives, and one implemented by the Association of King County Historical Organizations.³² Our advisory board and partners representing state, county, and municipal archivists reviewed drafts of the questionnaire for face validity, a simple form of validity in which researchers determine if the test seems to measure what it is intended to measure. This is often done with a panel of experts.³³ We revised the questionnaire based on their suggestions. We then pretested the questionnaire with 10 people from the general public and made additional changes for clarity. The final instrument in English appears as Appendix A.³⁴

The questionnaire features 12 questions divided into 2 sections: “Your trip generally” and “Your visit to this archives.” While the first 11 questions concern indirect measures of economic impact, question 12, the final question, attempts to measure social impact. This final question asks respondents how much they agree or disagree with 5 statements on how archives contribute to society.

³⁰ Public Services Quality Group, ed., *Survey of Visitors to UK Archives*.

³¹ Georgia Archives, “Out of State Visitors Survey” (2007).

³² AKCHO, *The Impact of Historical Organizations in King County: Public Benefit Survey Results*.

³³ Lynn Silipigni Connaway and Ronald R Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 62.

³⁴ The survey and full administration instructions for the English and French versions of the survey are on the Archival Metrics Website at <http://archivalmetrics.org>, accessed 1 October 2012. These can be freely downloaded after registration.

Survey Administration

In the United States, we worked with the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) to advertise and explain the survey. We announced the survey in the Government Archives Section at the Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting and held several conference calls to discuss the survey logistics and to answer questions.

In Canada, we partnered with the Council of Canadian Archives (CCA), which translated the survey and the administration instructions into French for repositories in Quebec. A French scholar independently checked the translation for accuracy. CCA sent a general invitation to participate to all members. In addition, Wendy Duff sent a personal invitation to the head of each government archives in Canada.

In both the United States and Canada, we sent a PDF copy of the questionnaire and administration instructions to archives that indicated their willingness to participate. The archives generated copies of the questionnaire and instructions from the PDF copy. We employed identical surveys in the United States and Canada, except that we changed “zip code” to “postal code” to align with Canadian usage. Archives in Quebec used the French version. Participating repositories agreed to offer the survey to every in-person visitor during the survey period. In both countries, the survey was offered for two weeks; in the United States from 31 August to 12 September 2009 and in Canada from 26 July to 7 August 2010. We selected these weeks after negotiating with the cosponsoring organizations in each country.

Respondents

In the United States, 43 repositories participated. Of those, the vast majority, 35 (81.4%), were state archives; 5 (11.6%) were county archives; and 3 (7.0%) municipal archives. We received 1,966 individual responses to the questionnaire. In Canada, 23 government repositories (provincial/territorial and municipal) administered the survey, which translated into 7 of the 10 provinces, 1 territory, and 6 cities.³⁵ There were 568 responses. Between the two countries, we received 2,534 responses from 51 states/provinces/territories, 5 counties (United States only), and 9 cities.

³⁵ Two of the Canadian provincial archives have branches that also administered the survey; therefore, the number of provincial repository sites where the survey was offered is larger than the number of provinces.

Survey Analysis

We developed a codebook for the questionnaire and entered the data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. We then migrated the data into SPSS statistical software for analysis. Each participating repository received the raw data from its collected surveys in an Excel spreadsheet, as well as an information sheet with descriptive statistics and charts showing its data. We also compiled reports for each country. The next section presents more detailed findings and provides some comparisons between the two countries.

Limitations

This survey has several limitations. Foremost, government archives in the United States and Canada are not the same, which makes comparing across the countries difficult on some dimensions. For example, the structures of governments and their archives differ. The United States has state and county governmental archives, while some provincial archives have regional branch repositories. More important, different levels of government hold different types of records, making it difficult to compare the reasons for visiting the different types of archives. For example, in the United States, property records (e.g. deeds or land records) are generally held at the municipal level, while in Canada provincial archives generally hold these records.

Measuring the indirect impact can be difficult, and we had problems identifying the number of people in each group (question 3). We asked respondents to record the number of people in their group and to count themselves in this number. However, a number of people indicated “0,” suggesting they did not count themselves. While we changed the “0” to “1,” we are not sure how many of the “1s” should have been “2s” and so on. Clarity on group size is essential to measuring economic impact. Likewise, we found a lack of consistent responses to the number of days and nights spent in the city and in the state/province (question 5); some people seemed to assume that a day also meant a night, and they indicated that they were in the province/state for the same days they were in the city. Finally, since we designed the survey on one double-sided sheet, some respondents only completed the first page, failing to turn it over to answer the questions on the opposite side in spite of instructions to do so.

Our survey methodology captured on-site usage rather than remote or mediated use. Therefore, we captured more tourists and genealogists and not the broader remote constituency or administrative users within governmental offices whose research might be completed by the archivists.

Findings

In this section, we present the findings from the 12 questions on the survey, along with analysis and reflection.

Reasons for Visiting

In both the United States and Canada, the majority of respondents indicated that they specifically planned their trip to visit the archives. This tendency was much stronger in the United States, where 79.0% of respondents ($n = 1,679$) stated the archives was the purpose of their trip, whereas in Canada, only 67.0% ($n = 415$) did. A chi-square test shows that this represents a significant difference, $\chi^2(2, N = 2,094) = 27, p < .000$. This difference may be an artifact of the timing of the Canadian survey at the height of the summer tourist season when proportionally more visitors came from out of the area. The U.S. survey was conducted around Labor Day (the last week of August and the first week of September), considered to be the end of the summer vacation time but still a well-traveled holiday in the United States.

We asked this question to assess whether users' visits to the archives were purpose-driven or one of many activities planned for their trip. Thus the response options: "I planned the trip specifically to visit this Archives," "I planned the trip to engage in other activities (for example, visit friends or relatives, visit an attraction, historic site or event), and to visit this Archives," or "I planned the trip for reason unrelated to this Archives." A number of people

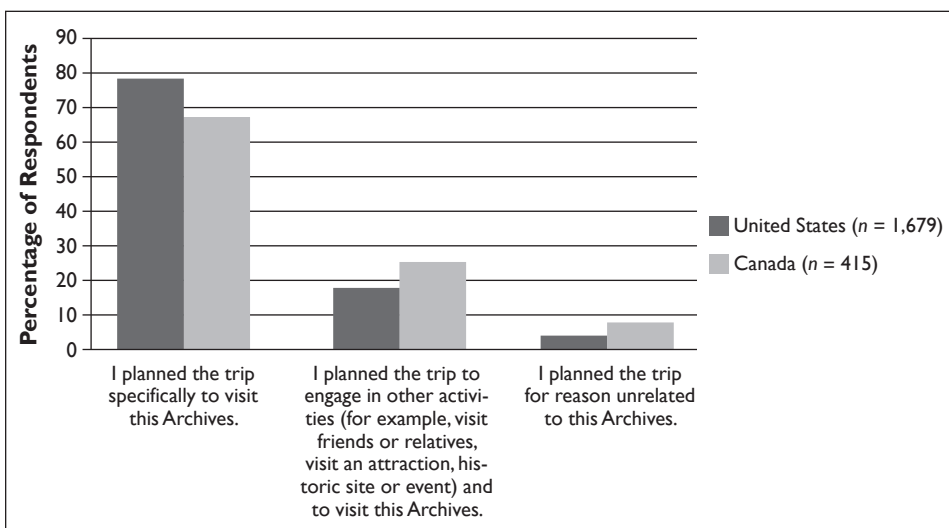


FIGURE 1. Reasons for visiting

wanted to tell us specifically why they were visiting the archives in this question (e.g., work, genealogy) rather than describe the pattern of their visit. We did ask respondents to state the purpose of their visit in another question, and the overwhelming response was for genealogy; 57.0% of respondents ($n = 1,443$) stated that genealogy/family history brought them to the archives.

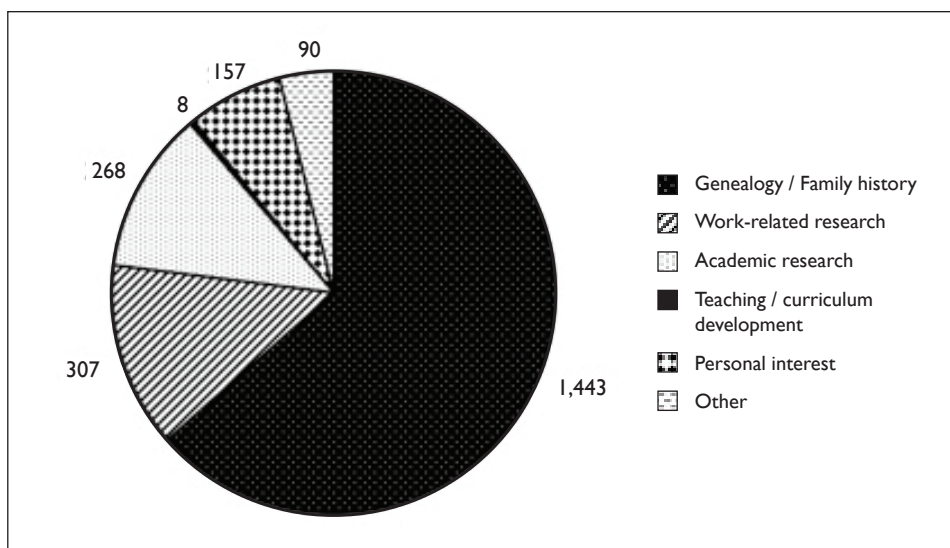


FIGURE 2. Purpose of the visit (all)

Looking a bit closer at these data, various patterns emerge. Usage patterns in the city archives differ from the state/province/territory and county archives. In particular, the percentages of work-related and general personal interest visits are much higher for municipal archives as shown in Figure 3. These differences were confirmed in a chi-square test, $\chi^2(10, N = 2,273) = 106.9, p < .000$.

Patterns of Visiting

We asked a series of questions to gain insight into visiting patterns, such as the number of people in a group, mode of transportation, length of stay in the area, and length of visit to the archives. The typical group size was 1.70 people, although the data ranged from 1 to 26 as our survey captured several large groups. The mode was 1, indicating that the vast majority of respondents (1,423 or 56.2%) came alone. Another 30.3% of the respondents ($n = 768$) came with one other person. As previously noted, there were also some issues with the

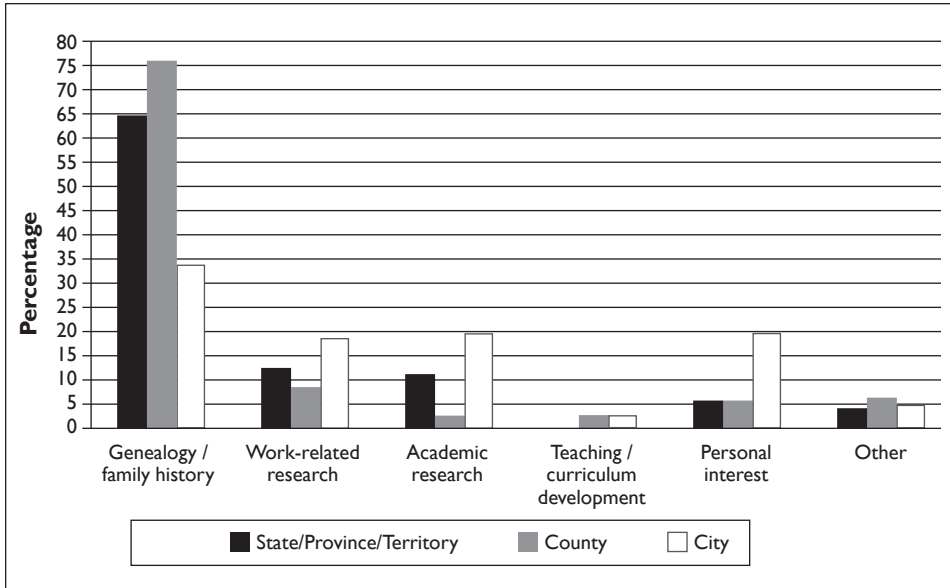


FIGURE 3. Purpose of the visit by type of repository

wording of this question, which asked respondents to count the number of people in their group, “including yourself.” A number of respondents marked “0” on the survey, which we converted to “1,” since obviously someone visiting the archives was filling out the survey.

Of the 2,451 respondents who indicated a mode of transportation, most ($n = 1,978$) drove to the archives (see Figure 4). However, in both U.S. and

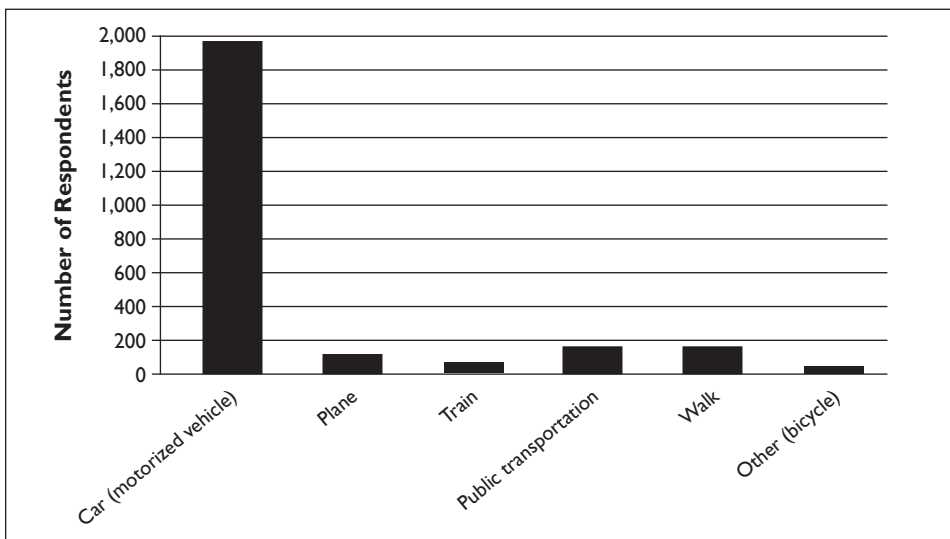


FIGURE 4. Mode of transportation

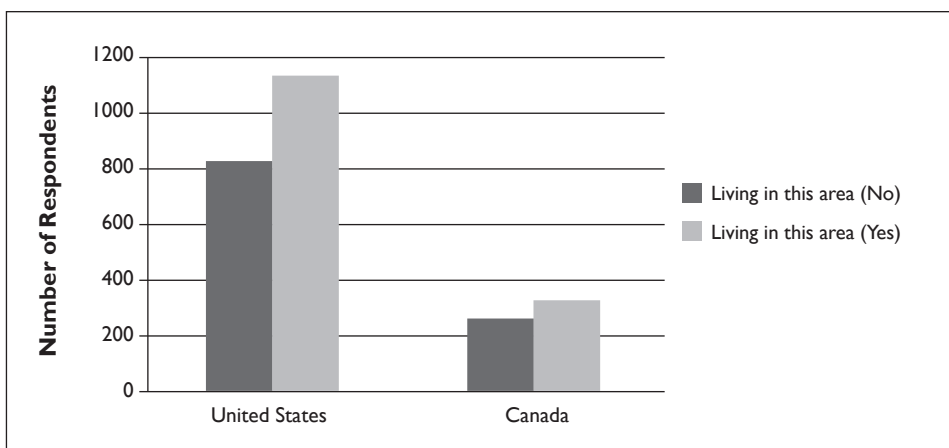


FIGURE 5. Living in the area

Canadian cities, there was a greater likelihood than in municipal/state archives of respondents using public transportation, taking the train, or walking to the municipal archives. More respondents also tended to use municipal archives for work-related research, $\chi^2(10, N = 2,451) = 429.2, p < .000$.

We asked archives visitors whether they lived in the area; 57.2% ($n = 1,449$) indicated that they did (see Figure 5).

For those who did not live in the area of the archives, we were interested in finding out how long they planned to stay in the region. We attempted to quantify this in terms of days and nights in the city and the state/province/

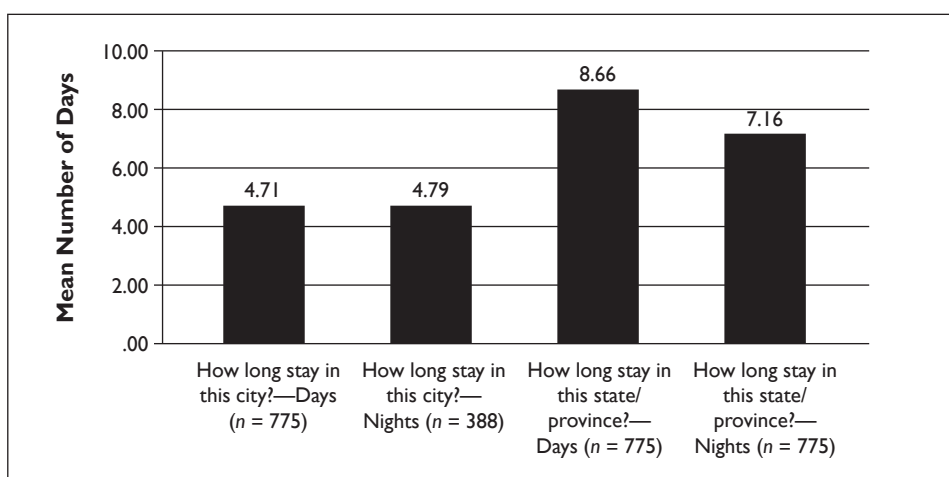


FIGURE 6. Length of stay in city/state/province

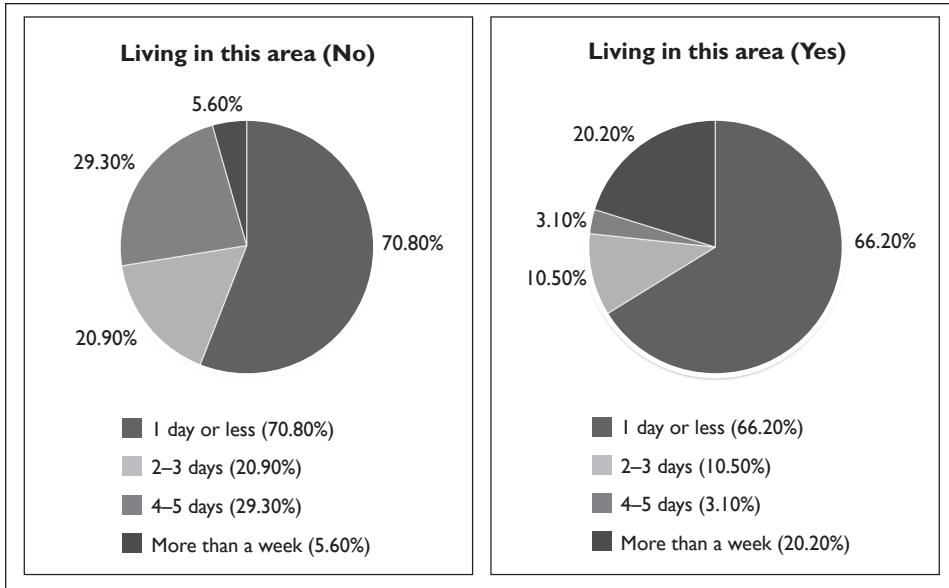


FIGURE 7. Length of visit to the archives by residence in or outside the area

territory; however, this was only partially successful. Respondents from outside the region (972) tended to indicate days but assumed nights, leaving the nights column blank, since the number of respondents indicating days for both the city and state/province/territory exceeds the number of respondents indicating nights (see Figure 6). The mean number of days spent in the city was 4.7; in the state/province/territory 8.7.

Given the amount of time spent in the area, it is interesting to note that 68.1% ($n = 1,561$) of all respondents, 66.2% of those living in the area and 70.0% of those from afar, planned to spend a day or less at the archives. However, when we examined those spending 2 to 3 and 4 to 5 days, a larger percentage of respondents from outside the area intended to visit the archives for more than one day. This difference might indicate the nature of the archival project, such as tourists working on one large project. Or, local respondents who have ready access to the archives can more easily divide their larger projects (e.g., genealogy or work-related projects) into day-long bits and visit the archives periodically over a longer span of time.

We attempted to identify any discernible patterns as to the types of project in which respondents were engaged and the length of their visits. We found that respondents with genealogical inquiries tended to visit the archives for a day or

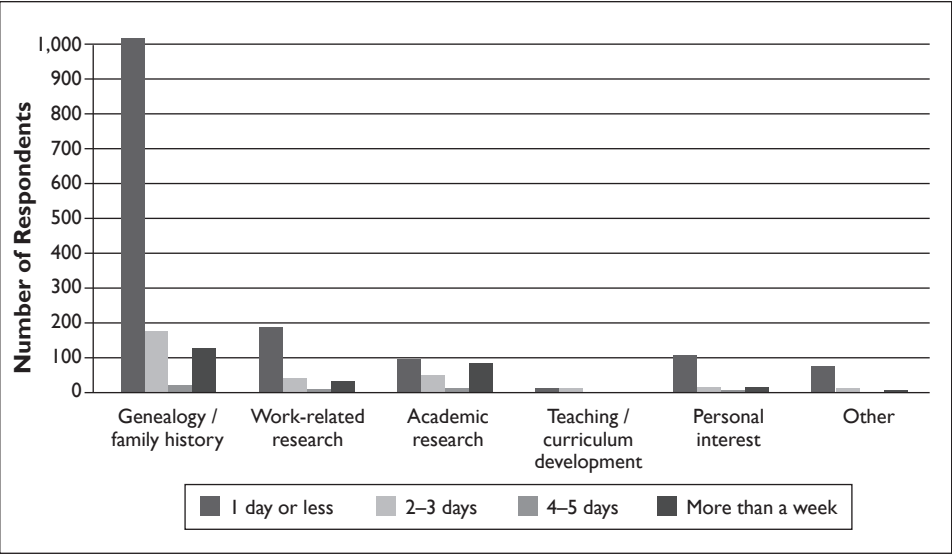


FIGURE 8. Length of visit to the archives and purpose of the visit

less (see Figure 8); however, since a majority of our respondents were involved in genealogical or family history topics, this skews the data.

Those visiting the archives from outside the area used a variety of lodging options as shown in Figure 9. Of the 1,041 respondents to this question, 261 people stayed at home even though they indicated living outside the area. This suggests that people travel a considerable distance for day trips to visit the archives. Of the respondents who lived outside the area, 40.2% stayed in some type of rented lodging (hotel, cottage, hostel, etc.).

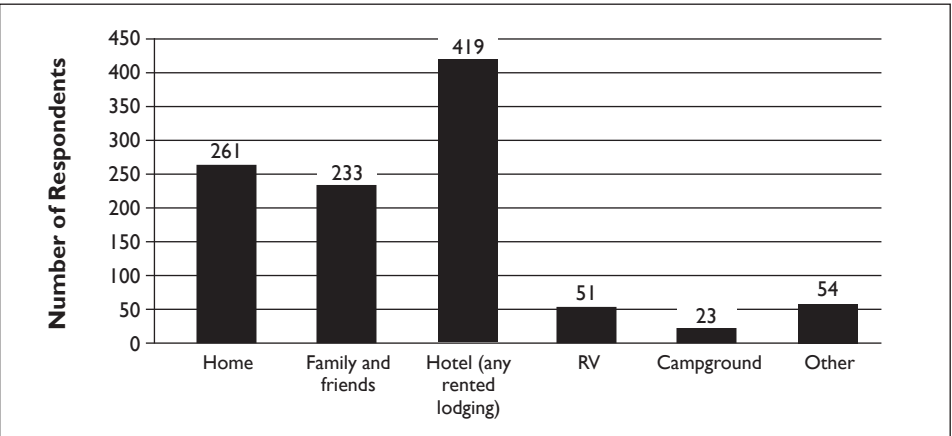


FIGURE 9. Type of lodging

This correlates with our information about the distance people travel to the archives. The 1,966 U.S. respondents traveled 214 miles on average; Canada's 568 respondents traveled slightly farther, at 250 miles. This difference may again be a result of timing the Canadian survey in the middle of the summer.

Spending in Conjunction with the Archives Visit

We asked respondents to estimate the total expenditures that they and their traveling companions planned to make during their stay. Sixty-four percent ($n = 1,342$) estimated between \$0 and \$99. However, during the two-week time period of the survey, 653 respondents from the area and 117 nonlocal visitors stated their groups spent \$100 or more with 248 spending \$1,000 or more (see Figure 10).

We decided to take a closer look at the out-of-the-area respondents to this question ($n = 916$) and to examine the time and the amount spent in the area. Not surprisingly, those who planned to spend longer in the archives tended to spend more money (see Figure 11). Those from out of the area were also more likely to spend \$100 or more than local respondents (see Figure 12).

In Figure 12, we examine expenditures by local and nonlocal respondents. A number (64 or 5.8%) of the local respondents claimed that their groups spent \$1,500 or more during their visits. Although we captured several large, local tour groups of 15 or more people in the survey, on closer examination, only 6 of these respondents filled out the expenditure information. Thirty-one (48.4%)

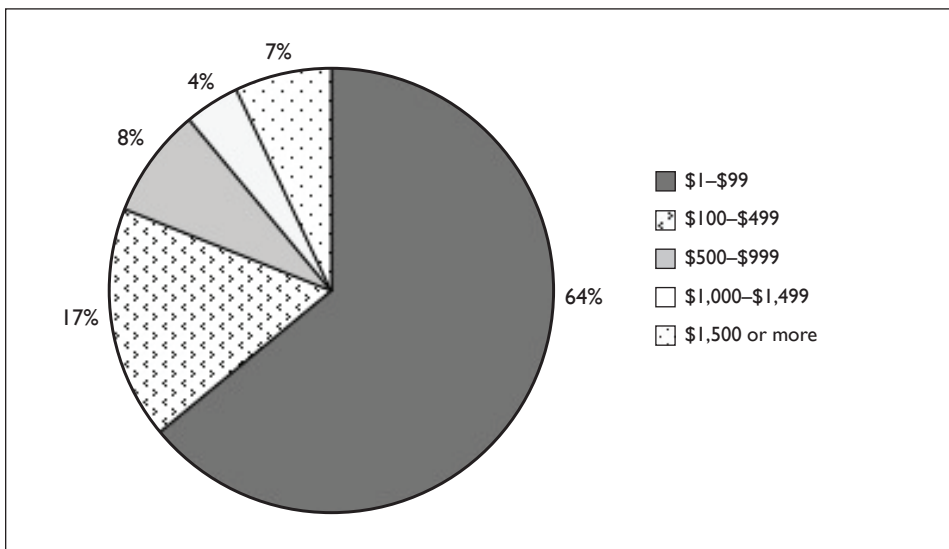


FIGURE 10. Total group expenditures

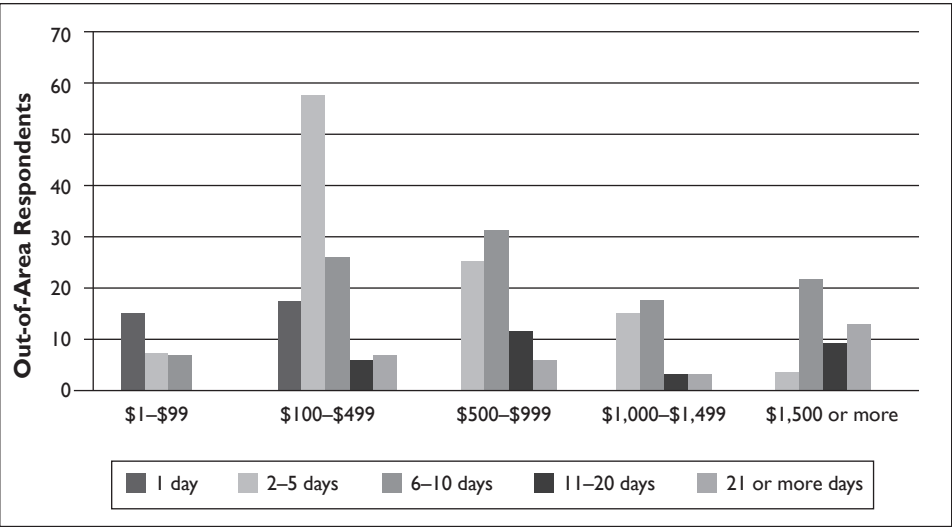


FIGURE 11. Out-of-area respondents: days spent in the archives

of these local researchers spent a week or more in the archives, but where or how the others spent this amount of money is a mystery.

While a majority of respondents ($n = 2,237$) listed their visit to the archives as the primary reason for their trip that day, they also indicated engagement in other activities. Seven percent ($n = 156$) said they planned to attend a theatrical, sporting, or cultural event; 28.1% ($n = 628$) intended to shop; and 46.2% ($n = 1,034$) would eat in a restaurant during their visit. A greater percentage of those visiting from a distance planned to engage in these activities; local respondents primarily indicated their intention to spend money eating and shopping (see Figure 13).

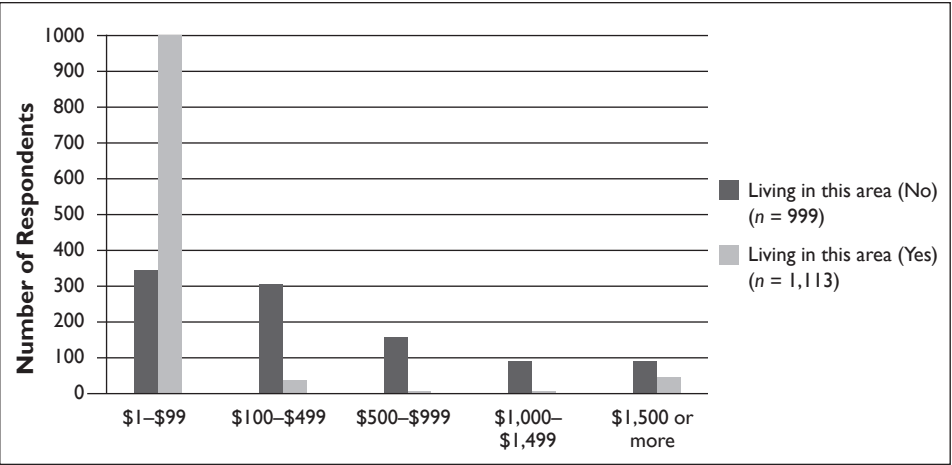


FIGURE 12. Expenditures by those living in and out of the area

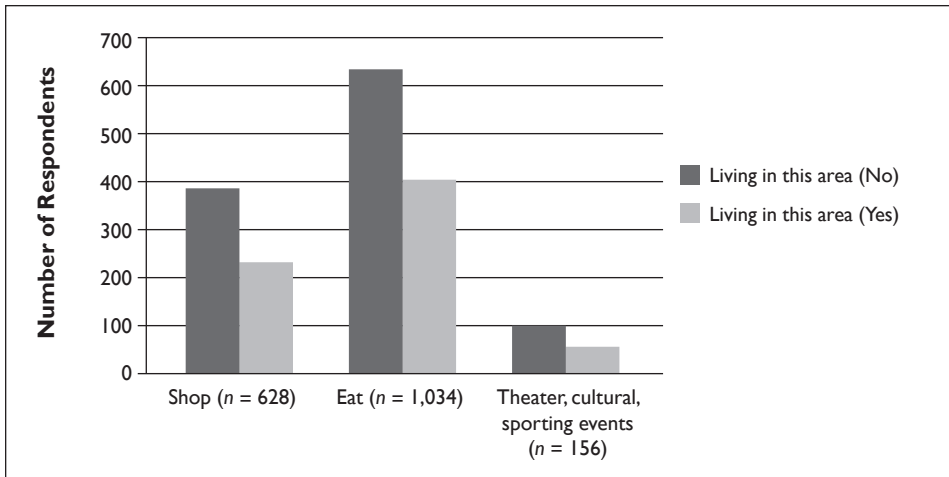


FIGURE 13. Shopping, eating, and cultural tourism in conjunction with the archives visit

Only 248 respondents indicated that they and/or their traveling companions intended to spend \$1,000 or more during their trip to the archives. Of these self-reported high spenders, the primary reason for their visit to the archives was genealogical or family history research. Additionally, 70.4% of these respondents indicated that they and their traveling companions planned to visit other cultural heritage sites during their trips. This indicates that this group of respondents is part of a group visiting archives as part of longer, more expensive trips that include visits to other cultural heritage sites.

Purposeful Archives Users and Cultural Heritage Tourism

We took a closer look at purposeful users who indicated in question 1 that they planned specifically to visit the archives. These individuals stayed in the region of the archival institution for a shorter period of time than nonpurposeful users (67.5% or 997 as opposed to 75.6% or 341), were far more likely to report staying in their own homes (75.6% or 1,547 respondents), and spent less (74.8% of purposeful users reported spending \$1 to \$99 during their archives visit) than their nonpurposeful counterparts. The habits nonpurposeful users reported suggest a tourist profile: longer length of stay, residence in hotels, and higher spending while in the area.

In question 8, we asked respondents whether they planned to visit other cultural or heritage sites during their trip. A total of 540 usable responses were provided to this question (we eliminated some illegible and generic answers (e.g., “other historic sites”), representing 21.3% of the total survey respondents. These 540 responses roughly divide into 6 categories: museums; historic sites; churches or cemeteries; national or state parks; other libraries, archives, or

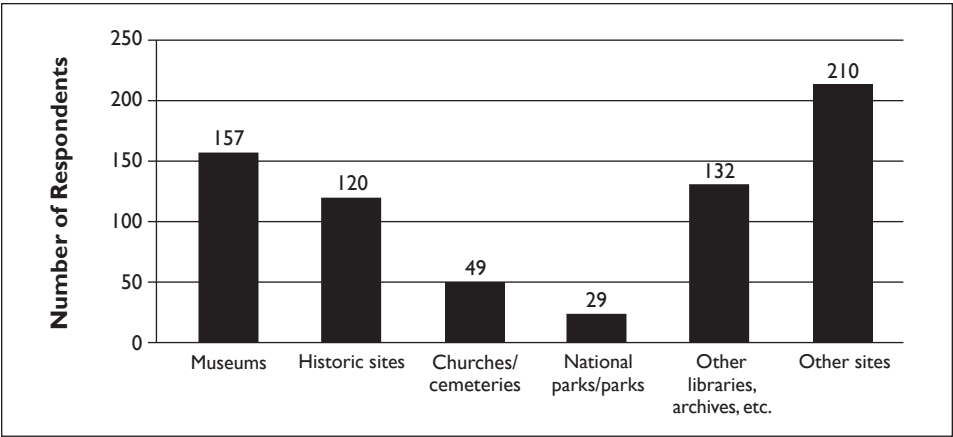


FIGURE 14. Reported visits to cultural and other sites (n = 540)

historical societies; and other sites. We placed respondents into more than one category if they listed multiple relevant activities; most (210) fell into the other grouping, which included such varied responses as theaters, other cities or towns, and business/shopping districts. Overall, 157 respondents indicated that they planned to visit museums, 132 listed another library or archives, 120 indicated that they planned to visit a historic site, 49 planned to visit a church or cemetery, and 29 cited a national or state park as a planned destination (see Figure 14).

Social Impact

In our final question, we asked respondents to provide their opinion of the social impact of archives based on 5 dimensions: opportunity for learning,

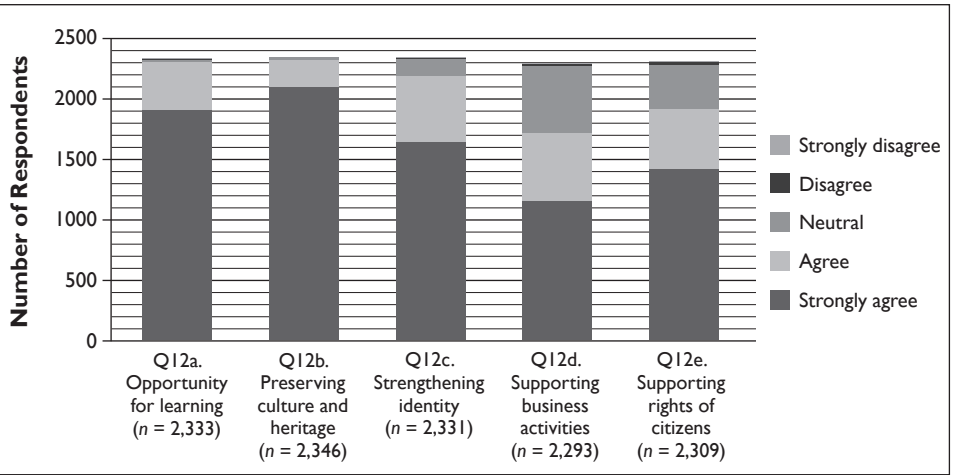


FIGURE 15. Social impacts of archives

preserving culture and heritage, strengthening identity, supporting business activities, and supporting the rights of citizens. The question provided a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree); respondents overwhelmingly agreed with all of these five dimensions (see Figure 15). Support for archives as preserving culture and heritage received the highest ranking with a mean of 1.12, and support for business activities received the lowest ranking with a mean of 1.75; the mean ratings for all statements were very positive. We found no significant difference between the ratings from U.S. and Canadian respondents.

Discussion

This study provides the first broad overview of indirect economic impact of government archives in either the United States or Canada. The United Kingdom has been conducting similar surveys since 2002 and has accumulated important trend data for indirect measures of archives' economic impact, while our North American data represents a single administration of our survey. Thus, our discussion focuses on three aspects of our study. First, we discuss our research question, "Do archives have an indirect economic impact on the local economy?" by elaborating on the findings and comparing them to other studies. Second, we address the methodological issues of indirect measurement of economic impact. Finally, we consider what other types of impacts should be considered when assessing archives and examine the results of the social impact questions and the role of archives in society.

Economic Impact?

Our major research question asked whether archives have an indirect economic impact. As a result of this survey we can say yes, archives do have a limited indirect impact on local economies, particularly in terms of shopping, dining, and lodging in the area. We will examine these figures in two ways, first attempting to extrapolate a larger dollar figure for this impact and then looking proportionally at the amount of money archives' visitors spend compared to patrons of public libraries and other heritage sites.

A majority of our respondents (83.3%) spent some money in conjunction with their archives visits. If we conservatively say that the average spent in our sample was \$50 per person,³⁶ and we extrapolate this over a year, we arrive at over \$2.64 million spent annually by archives' visitors.³⁷

³⁶ We determined this generic, conservative figure by the collection of spending information in buckets in the survey. We felt that a calculation based on the data collected would require too many conceptual steps to move from the data to a per-person, per-day figure.

³⁷ Fifty dollar average for 2,112 people every 2 weeks over the course of a year adjusting for times the archives is closed ($50 \times 2112 \times 25$)

Using this approach, the economic impact of archives is real, but modest. Our findings on spending are comparable to those from other cultural institutions. *Arts and Economic Prosperity III* reports that, on average, local visitors (defined as from the county in which an event takes place) spend \$19, while nonlocal (defined as from outside the county in which an event takes place) spend \$40; on average the typical attendee spends \$27.79 for all people excluding admission.³⁸ Stynes's study of National Park Service visitors found that half of the spending is for lodging and meals, with average expenditures of \$40.36 for a local day trip (within 60 miles) and \$69.60³⁹ by those traveling farther than 60 miles. In the Wisconsin Public Libraries economic impact survey, respondents spent an additional \$24.63 they would not otherwise have spent had they not gone to the library.⁴⁰ Our finding that local visitors generally spend from \$1 to \$100 is in line with these other studies. In fact, we found better economic indicators in some cases. For example, we found that 46.0% of our respondents ate out during their visits to the archives, whereas in the National Park Service survey, only 24.0% spent money on restaurants.⁴¹ Our percentage compares to the finding by the Carnegie Library (50.0%).⁴² One major difference between our study and these others is that the people in our sample self-identified as "living in the area" or "not living in the area," thus our equivalent of "local" encompassed respondents traveling from far greater distances to use the archives. We conjecture that collateral spending would not have occurred without their archives' visits.

We realize the pressure to make an economic argument. Randy Cohen, William Schaffer, and Benjamin Davidson's 2003 comment holds more true than ever: "At this time in history, economic development is perhaps the most persuasive message when making the case for arts support to local, state, and national leaders."⁴³ However, we question whether the rush to determine economic impact is prudent or even strategic for archives. We found that most of the archives' on-site visitors from out of the area are interested in family history. Emily Heinlen has documented a downturn in genealogical research travel; genealogists are not traveling as much because they can now access

³⁸ Lynch, *Arts and Economic Prosperity III*, 10.

³⁹ Stynes, *Economic Benefits to Local Communities from National Park Visitation and Payroll*, 3.

⁴⁰ NorthStar Economics, Inc., *The Economic Contribution of Wisconsin Public Libraries*, 44.

⁴¹ Stynes, *Economic Benefits to Local Communities from National Park Visitation and Payroll*, 4.

⁴² CED, *Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh: Community Impact and Benefits*, 20.

⁴³ Randy Cohen, William Schaffer, and Benjamin Davidson, "Arts and Economic Prosperity: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts Organizations and Their Audiences," *Journal of Arts, Management, Law, and Society* 33, no.1: 31.

scanned documents on the Web.⁴⁴ One indication may be the profitability of ancestry.com, one of the largest suppliers of genealogical documents. Despite a slow economy, ancestry.com's profits continue to rise.⁴⁵ Selling the archives as solely an economic engine may conflict with other initiatives to put things on the Web and open up government archives. Viewed from another perspective, a majority of respondents live in the local area, indicating that archives are fulfilling an important service to their local citizens.

Do we think archivists should abandon economic analyses of their organizations and services? No. But how archives market themselves is important. Archives can and should better understand their place in their local economy and their relationship to the larger cultural heritage sector. While archives are not a great economic engine, they could do better. Given archives' limited impact on the local economy alone, we argue that it is worthwhile to examine how archives fit into the larger ecology of cultural heritage institutions in an area. Archives are one component of the cultural heritage sector, but they could capitalize more on this connection. Archives should work with their fellow cultural institutions and focus more on cross promotion. We found natural allies in visitation patterns among archives and a core group of other cultural institutions in an area. Examination of the other types of activities in which respondents engaged provides some indication of cultural heritage tourism patterns. Archives could use these data to develop targeted advertising and/or outreach campaigns. Collaborating with similar institutions that users visited in tandem could aid both institutions and increase gate count. This raises a number of issues about how archives might participate in cultural heritage partnerships with nearby organizations. Conversely, archives could begin to encourage local businesses, particularly eateries and shops, to advertise in the archives. This might also provide a service to users from out of town who may not know the geographic area around the archives. We are not arguing that institutions should converge, just that they should collaborate to better promote their services. Collaboration would strengthen all cultural heritage sites in a given region.

In these trying times, making an economic argument to support archives is seductive. Yet, our data show little support for this argument and suggest that archives need better rationales for their support. The survey provides no overwhelming evidence that archives have a great economic indirect benefit; while visitors eat, shop, and stay in hotels, the numbers are relatively small compared with figures related to visitors to other cultural organizations.

⁴⁴ Emily Heinlen, "Genealogy and the Economic Drain on Ireland: Unintended Consequences," *First Monday* 12, no. 1 (2007), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/1424>, accessed 28 July 2011.

⁴⁵ Michael Vodicka, "Ancestry.com Profiting from the Past," *Forbes*, 9 June 2011, <http://blogs.forbes.com/zacks/2011/06/09/ancestry-com-profiting-from-the-past/>.

Furthermore, particularly for local visitors, many economists would view these expenditures as “substitution effects”—money that would have already been spent elsewhere in the community.⁴⁶ Archives need to identify a means of demonstrating value to society using economic as well as other types of value; social impact factors discussed below might be a place to begin. Government records have legal, financial, and historical value, and they are institutions of accountability. Archives need to promote their role in helping to maintain good government as well as their social values and to focus on the overwhelming local constituency they serve.

Impact: The Role of Archives in Society

Government archives have dual missions of preserving culture and providing accountability and support for government. Borrowing questions from the PSQG surveys in the United Kingdom, we also sought to measure how users perceive the role of archives in society. Although many government archives reference their role vis-à-vis accountability and support for government in their mission statements, users identified archives most strongly as supporting culture and heritage. Although all of our indicators for the 5 variables making up the social impact factor (learning, culture and heritage, strengthening identity, support for business, and supporting the rights of citizens) were higher than those reported in the PSQG studies, the overall trends in measurement align with those they report.⁴⁷ In fact, these measures have steadily risen in the United Kingdom since it first introduced the measure.

The PSQG has used the social impact question since 2004. In all the iterations of that instrument, no factor analysis has ever been done on this question to determine whether collectively the 5 questions could be considered a true social impact factor for archives. We attempted to do this type of factor analysis on our data but since the variance (.63) and standard deviation (.27) were small, we found the items to be highly correlated (at the 0.01 level using a 2-tailed test). The PSQG is getting results with greater variance, and we urge them to do a similar test to determine whether a social impact factor exists.

The strength of the cultural and learning measures may be an artifact of our sampling strategy based on in-person visitors. If we had sampled remote reference users, we would undoubtedly have picked up government employees and legislative aides who might have assigned different ratings to the social impact measures. Terry Cook, among others, argues that archives should return

⁴⁶ Arthur H. Sterngold, “Do Economic Impact Studies Misrepresent the Benefits of Arts and Cultural Organizations?,” *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 34, no. 3 (2004): 166–87.

⁴⁷ PSQG, *Survey of Visitors to UK Archives 2011*, 23–27.

to their core values: accountability, evidence, and preserving cultures.⁴⁸ While Cook approaches this holistically, we do think that there may be some discrepancy between external visitors' perceptions of the role of government archives and internal archivists' perceptions of their mandates.

The results from the survey support the value of archival collections. Our respondents overwhelmingly indicated that their visit to the archives was the primary reason for their trip that day. This is encouraging and shows that archives in and of themselves are a draw. Most of these users lived locally. While this is not a good determinant for economic impact, it does demonstrate that government archives are addressing the information needs of local citizens who are purportedly the taxpayers who support them.

While those who visit the archives understand that they have value, both on a personal and a social scale this represents a small percentage of the population. Users understand the importance of archives, therefore their high ratings of their importance are not surprising. It would be interesting to replicate this section of the survey in another population (e.g., visitors to other historic sites or shoppers at a mall) to elicit a broader public perception of the significance of archives.

Conclusion

Our article reports on the first research project to examine the economic impact of archives on a national scale. We hope that it is not the last. We encourage replication as well as studies examining economic impact using different methodologies. To begin, we propose several avenues of research that would be fruitful to explore. First, we need multi-institutional, longitudinal studies of economic and social impact, such as those conducted in the United Kingdom, to better understand how timing influenced our survey and whether seasonal variations affected the data gathered. Second, we need to develop a measure that accurately assesses per-person per-day expenditures. Expenditures have been measured in other areas of cultural heritage tourism, and a comparative measure with other cultural heritage institutions would be valuable.⁴⁹ Third, gathering data on direct as well as indirect benefits would be helpful. Exploring the uses of municipal archives might be particularly revealing, employing not only survey methodology but interviews or focus groups. Our findings suggest that differing use patterns of municipal archives—business uses, including by municipal employees, and personal uses outside of genealogy,

⁴⁸ Terry Cook, "Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91): 123–34.

⁴⁹ See James Mak, James Moncur, and David Yonamine, "How to and How Not to Measure Visitor Expenditures," *Journal of Travel Research* 16 (1977): 1–4; and Douglas C. Frechtling, "An Assessment of Visitor Expenditure Methods and Models," *Journal of Travel Research* (2006): 26–35.

possibly researching one's property—may indicate a means of exploring direct economic benefits. Fourth, our survey uncovered usage patterns that could feed back into programmatic and service planning. This type of information would be useful for archives managers, but better understanding of these usage patterns may also help discern the motivations behind the spending patterns associated with archives visits. Finally, we need to look beyond the walls of the archives and extend our research on users and on user visitation patterns across cultural institutions. We hope that others will take up our call and conduct their own studies in this area to get a richer picture of archives' role in the larger economy.

While this survey does not provide definitive answers about the strength of the economic impact of archives, it fits one piece into the larger puzzle of economic impact studies. Our analyses also point to the importance of considering other types of impact, such as social and cultural, alongside economic impact as equally important measures of archives' true role in society. While government archives can be considered cultural institutions on the one hand, on the other, they are agencies serving the public and their parent governments to foster accountability and an informed citizenry. This hybrid character makes government archives unique, and we argue that archives need a more multifaceted approach to assessing impact.

APPENDIX A

Visiting the Archives

Please help us measure the impact of archives. Archives across the nation are conducting a survey during two weeks in August and September. Your participation is anonymous and will take less than five minutes. Thank you!

Section 1: Your Trip Generally.

In this section, we ask you about your trip to this area

1. Which best describes your reason for visiting this area and the Missouri State Archives?

(Please select **one** only)

- ☐ I planned the trip specifically to visit this Archives
- ☐ I planned the trip to engage in other activities (for example, visit friends or relatives, visit an attraction, historic site or event) and to visit this Archives
- ☐ I planned the trip for reasons unrelated to this Archives
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

2. What is your home zip or postal code?

3. Including yourself, how many people traveled with you today?

4. How did you and your companions travel?

(Please select **one** only)

- ☐ By car
- ☐ By plane
- ☐ By train
- ☐ By bus
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

5. How long do you plan to stay?

- ☐ in this City?
_____ day(s) _____ night(s)
- ☐ in this State/Province
_____ day(s) _____ night(s)
- ☐ I live in this area

6. Where are you staying?

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ In our own home
- ☐ With family or friends
- ☐ In a hotel
- ☐ In your RV
- ☐ At a campground
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

7. Please estimate the total expenditures (e.g., including travel, accommodations, food, entertainment, souvenirs), you and your travelling companions plan to spend during your stay in this area:

- ☐ \$1 - \$99
- ☐ \$100 - \$499
- ☐ \$500 - \$999
- ☐ \$1000 - \$1499
- ☐ \$1500 - or more

8. Do you or your travelling companions plan to visit other cultural or heritage sites?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes. Please list these sites below

APPENDIX A

Section 2: Your Visit to the Archives. In this section, we ask you about your visit to the archives.

9. What purpose best describes your research at this Archives? (Please select one only)

- ☐ Genealogy / Family history
- ☐ Work-related research
- ☐ Academic research
- ☐ Teaching / curriculum development
- ☐ Personal interest
- ☐ Other (Please specify) _____

10. How many days do you plan to spend at this archives?

- ☐ Less than 1 day
- ☐ 2–3 days

- ☐ 4–6 days
- ☐ More than 1 week

11. In connection with your visit to this archives, which of the following are you or your travelling companions planning to do today? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Shop or use local services
- ☐ Eat in restaurants
- ☐ Attend theater, cultural, or sporting events
- ☐ Other (Please specify) _____
- ☐ None of the above

12. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by checking the appropriate box.

Archives contribute to society by:	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Providing opportunities for learning					
Preserving our culture and heritage					
Strengthening family and community identity					
Supporting administrative and business activity					
Supporting the rights of citizens					

Thank you for your Participation!

Please return this form to the Reference Desk when complete.