Cultural Organizations as Flourishing Businesses: Case Studies and Potential in Toronto area Museums

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Context

As we move toward a world of increasingly scarce resources, changing climate and burgeoning populations, the world needs new ways to solve problems. Business as usual is insufficient. Around the world, organizations of all kinds (business, governments and non-profits) are changing – yet more can be done. Cultural organizations, both highly trusted by the public and non-partisan entities, are in a unique position to catalyze creative change and adaptation towards a culture of sustainability.

Introduction to Flourishing Business

Based on the graduate work of Antony Upward, a novel tool to investigate business models has been evolving and being tested through the Strongly Sustainable Business Model Group (SSBMG), housed at OCADU. Called the Flourishing Businesses Model Canvas (FMB Canvas), the tool provides a framework of 16 questions that can guide organizations toward financially rewarding, socially beneficial, and environmentally regenerative operations. Although this work began with the intention to apply the Canvas to the for-profit sector, there is emergent thinking that 'flourishing' applies to non-profit organizations as well.

The existence of the FBM Canvas with the Strategic Foresight and Innovation (SFI) program at OCADU brings a unique, but largely untested, set of ideas and methods into focus. The opportunity seized in this research initiative was to have graduate students, under the guidance of industry partners, research the existing relationships between museums in the greater Toronto area (GTA) and the FBM Canvas. Students in OCADU's graduate department of SFI are well positioned for this research as they are developing skills and methods related to imagining futures and developing ways of planning to move toward preferred futures.

Why Museums?

This focus on cultural organizations -- specifically museums -- reflects on work Douglas Worts has undertaken using the FBM Canvas with museums in Santa Fe and Edmonton as well as Charlotte Young's extensive work on organizational assessment and effectiveness of diverse nonprofits.

Project Description

This project began to explore the question: "How can museums act as catalysts for sustainable behaviour?" It consisted of preliminary desk-based research on the nature and extent to which some 70 museums in the GTA are operating in a way that promotes sustainability or "flourishing." The second question the researchers asked was 'which organizations might be best positioned to partner with for an active research initiative that would use the FBM Canvas to help develop and test new strategies for community engagement that move stakeholders, and the community at large, towards a 'culture of sustainability'.

This research project was bounded by publicly available information from museums in the GTA. This constraint was designed into the study for practical reasons of limited time and the large number of organizations.

Researchers knew from the outset that there would be significant gaps between the realities of the museum operations and the scope of the FBM Canvas. Such gaps are important to identify and address in our ongoing research.

OCADU selected two graduate students in the SFI program, Olabiyi Adeolu Dipeolu and Frank Sedghipour, to participate as Research Assistants in this project.

Purpose of the Research

In conducting this initial scan of museums in the GTA, the specific purposes of the research were to:
- identify organizations that are inclined towards 'flourishing' as defined by the FBM Canvas
- identify organizations that may be good candidates to work with in the future to develop an approach based on concepts of 'flourishing'
- enable graduate students to apply some of what they have learned in the their studies in foresight, planning, design and business modeling, to real world situations
- build links between OCADU and industry partners towards strengthening the connections between theory and practice, and
- provide useful and relevant data to the SSBMG as it pursues the advancement of the FBM Canvas.

Methodology

In conjunction with Monica Contreras, Director of Operations, Digital Media Research + Innovation Institute, industry partners, ENVision…Synergy and WorldViews Consulting, prepared a proposal to conduct research into the potential fit between the FBM Canvas and the museum sector. By using information available through online searches, the researchers felt that a snapshot of the field would reveal candidates that might be interested in working towards realizing the potential of 'flourishing' within their operations. Over the course of March and part of April, 2015, the industry partners worked with the two students to collect and analyze relevant organizational data, ultimately identifying a few candidates for potential future work.

After introducing the project to the graduate students, including both the context of museums and the potential for flourishing, through the use of the FBM Canvas, we followed the following seven steps in investigating the museum sector in the GTA and in narrowing down potential sites for detailed case studies:

1. Created a working "spreadsheet" with elements to be identified for each short listed case museum based on the FBM Canvas (Appendix A shows the list of elements)
2. Identified a list of museums in the GTA for review (Appendix B)
3. Assessed the museums on the list for signs of significant inclination towards a 'flourishing' approach to their work (e.g. an integrated set of value propositions related to social, environmental and economic dimensions; or potentially some inclination towards addressing environmental impacts of their operations; etc.)
4. Rated the full list of museums for their potential for more in-depth analysis, offering a rationale for the rating by placing each museum into one of three categories: high, medium or low degree of compatibility with FBM Canvas philosophy
5. Created a short list of museums that appeared to us, based on the internet-based information we examined, to be compatible with or receptive to the FBM Canvas philosophy.
6. Analyzed a short list of museums by asking five questions[1]:
   1. **Why** does the museum exist – what is it trying to accomplish or achieve over time? (Outcomes)
   2. **Who** is involved with the museum? Who does what, for whom, and with whom else? (People)
   3. **What** value does the museum create or destroy in society? What needs is the museum meeting in society (monetary, aesthetic, psychological, physiological, utilitarian)? What needs and opportunities does the organization satisfy? (Value)
   4. **How, where** and **with what** does the museum do its work? (Process)
   5. In what **organizational environment** does it operate/ reside? (Organizational environment)
7. To the extent possible, began to map the short listed museums onto the 16 elements of the Canvas using "mural.ly," an on-line platform for depicting business models.

Findings

Museums were generally considered any facility that either called themselves a museum or have the classic components/functions of museums (especially: collecting, exhibiting, preserving, interpreting, and researching). Toronto has over 75 museums.[2]

Generic Business Models

Generally, museums are not inclined towards the principles or goals of flourishing, as defined by the FBM Canvas. In most instances, museums are organized around a collection, building or story. They are designed as destinations within the leisure-time economy, and have focuses that

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[1]The first four questions are referred to as "perspectives" in the FBM Canvas. Researchers added the fifth, "organizational environment" to look for an initial indication of how nimble and receptive the museum might be for change.

[2]See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_museums_in_Toronto, Accessed, March 2, 2015

include history, science, art or craft. As non-profits and/or charities, they are dependent on finances provided by government, foundations, admissions or a limited amount of self-generated revenue. Much of the work in museums takes place within organizational environments that are constrained by traditional structures and priorities.

The museums we investigated used the following business approaches:
1. Showcasing displays and exhibits, ranging from individual artworks to elaborate exhibitions (some permanent, some temporary, some rotating). For rotating and temporary exhibits, these involved both juried and non-juried selection processes. Rarely is there an expressed, community-based set of outcomes related to these initiatives.
2. Offering programs for diverse audiences. The types of programs varied from quite creative (e.g., a farmers' market at an historical inn) to more standard camps, school programs and tours of the exhibits housed within the museum's walls. Audiences for these programs ranged from school children to "general" public. Rarely did the websites mention targeted audiences, such as certain ethnic groups, youth, seniors, new mothers, etc. And even more rarely did these programs have any suggestion of performance measures to gauge 'success' with regard to individuals, groups, communities, etc. beyond attendance.
3. Preserving spaces for people to enjoy as a recreational destination (e.g., looking at the past through the lens of, for example, an historic school house, etc.)
4. Renting out space for public events, such as weddings and parties.
5. Operating using diverse governance models from an artist-operated space, to being funded by a municipality or a government arts council. Most of the museums had a board that governed it.
6. Hybrids of the above identified elements.

Museums with High Potential for Flourishing
Some museums have begun to expand their focus beyond traditional activities. As a result, we felt that a few museums might be good candidates to engage with in an effort to integrate the FBM principles into their operations. The museums that we felt lent themselves most fully to this potential are:

OCADU galleries
Because OCADU galleries exist within the organizational environment of OCADU, they might offer the potential to look for a synergistic relationship between the FBM Canvas project within SFI and one of the galleries – most likely the Student Gallery.

Black Creek Pioneer Village
Because this facility exists within the organization of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, which has a strong tradition and inclination towards sustainability work, there may be both receptivity within the site, and support within the larger parent organization. It has already committed to monitoring and reducing its environmental footprint, and is interested in linking the past to the present in relevant ways.

Select City of Toronto Museums

Montgomery's Inn, Todmorden Mills and The Scarborough Museum are all museums within the Culture Division of the City of Toronto. These three museums show signs of a desire to be relevant to and engaged with local communities. Although the overarching direction of the City of Toronto museums remains fairly traditional, it may be worthwhile to explore some kind of partnership with one or more of these sites.

Montgomery's Inn has demonstrated its commitment to working with community, and acknowledges the diversity of the community and sees value in partnerships, innovation and building relationships. It has experimented with sustainability planning models in the past.

Scarborough Museum is a community museum dedicated to being a 'mirror' of the community -- preserving local history, but also engaging contemporary culture. Although it is a "destination" it also works across the community. Its volunteer program is an initiative in community engagement and relationship building.

Todmorden Mills is collection of historic buildings that were once part of the community of "Todmorden." In addition to the historic buildings, the site is adjacent to a natural preserve, where visitors can enjoy walking the trails to see diverse natural habitats and wildflowers. Todmorden offers some interesting programming – working in conjunction with theatre groups, as well as local natural heritage groups.

Limitations to the Study:

The study had numerous limitations, which can be addressed in future stages of research.

Currently, and because the FBM Canvas is a new and evolving tool, graduate students have limited understanding of the complexities of the FBM Canvas. In future, we would spend more time reviewing the FBM Canvas in much more detail to ensure that the students' understanding was aligned with the demands of the research.

Like most people, students have a sense of what museum do, which affects how they approach linking these organizations to the concept of flourishing. As industry partners, our approach to museums is based on an emerging model of museums as cultural facilitators of flourishing/resiliency/sustainability within the larger community. In future phases of this work, we would like to spend more time bringing the students up to speed on the museological issues related to organizational change within museums.

Mapping existing, publicly available information to the FBM Canvas is conceptually challenging – especially when limited to publicly available information on the internet. Moreover, students were not well equipped to link that publicly available information, such as the goals specified in a strategic plan document, with the relevant dimensions of the Canvas, such as "values" or "outcomes" components. As another example, information regarding the biophysical resources an institution uses was not readily available in publicly available information. In future work, we

would like to discuss and review with students how various types of publicly available information might map to the dimensions of the FBB Canvas.

Definitions of each of the 16 elements are evolving and therefore tricky to apply. The sixteen elements of the Canvas appears overwhelming to users who do not have experience working in organizational change. As a starting point, the four perspectives ((value proposition, people, process and outcomes) offer a useful approximation for thinking about a business model, although they lack some of the thinking needed for socially beneficial and environmentally regenerative operations.

Lessons and Next Steps

The value of this work in Toronto was to identify institutions with which to establish an ongoing relationship -- selected and motivated local museums that share or may be striving towards the vision and values associated with the FBM Canvas. It also brought practical benefits to graduate students to be involved in an initiative designed to foster meaningful change towards sustainability in an important and well-positioned sector of society.

The FBM Canvas is a powerful and intricate tool for helping organizations to re-think their fundamental goals, vision and approach. 'Flourishing', as a concept of integrated, multiple value propositions (economic, social and environmental) is enormously complex. As an evolving tool, there is much for all of us to continue to learn.

As part of the 'cultural sector', the role of museums has been defined rather specifically to refer to a place that collects and preserves 'important' materials, as well as conducts public education related to them. As non-profits, they depend on grants, donations and a limited amount of self-generated revenue. However, like the for-profit sector, which is currently experiencing great pressure to transform businesses into multiple-value-proposition organizations that add value on economic, social and environmental fronts, museums must look deeply into their traditions and assumptions if they are to embrace the concept of flourishing.

Subsequent stages of this project could lead to approaching and working with museums that are interested in using the FBM Canvas as an organizational development tool. Further work could also be an opportunity to build closer ties between graduate students at OCADU, members of the SSBMG, and partner organizations that are interested in this work.

Appendix A. Elements of spreadsheet to guide initial thinking

Name of Organization
Type of Organization
Website address
Neighbourhood
Area in the City
Summary of what they do/offer
Mission/Vision
Value Propositions: What benefits does the organization generate (social, economic, environmental, etc.)?
Process: How do they do it and where? (transactional?, relational?, etc.)
People/stakeholders: Who does it do it for/with??
Outcomes: How is Success Measured?
Organizational Context – e.g. are they part of a larger entity? What?
Organizational Environment: How much control/autonomy does the organization have?
Rating potential for engaging on 'flourishing': H = 3, M=2, L=1
Rationale for assessment
Additional Info
Comments by other members of the research team
Team Member inputting this organization's data

Appendix B. Long list of museums investigated

1. Art Gallery of Mississauga
2. U of T Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design:
   a. Eric Arthur Gallery
   b. Larry Wayne Richards Gallery"
3. Ontario College of Art & Design Galleries
   a. Student Gallery
   b. Graduate Gallery
4. Redpath Sugar Museum
5. Riverdale Farm
6. City of Toronto Museums:
   a. Historic Zion Schoolhouse
   b. Montgomery's Inn
   c. Scarborough Museum
   d. Todmorden Mills Museum & Arts Centre
   e. Colborne Lodge
   f. Market Gallery
   g. Spadina House
   h. Fort York National Historic Site
7. Toronto Free Gallery
8. A Space Gallery
9. Aga Khan Museum
10. Art Gallery of York University
11. Black Creek Pioneer Village
12. Doris McCarthy Gallery
13. Enoch Turner Schoolhouse
14. Glendon Gallery
15. InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Centre
16. Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre
17. Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
18. Museum of Inuit Art
19. Neilson Park Creative Centre
20. Oral History Museum
21. Royal Ontario Museum
22. Ryerson Image Centre
23. Saint Mark's Coptic Museum
24. Textile Museum of Canada
25. T-D Gallery of Inuit Art
26. University of Toronto Art Centre
27. York Museum
28. 48th Highlanders Museum
29. Applewood (Ontario)
30. Art Gallery of Ontario
31. Bata Shoe Museum
32. Campbell House Museum
33. Canadian Air and Space Museum
34. Canadian Motorsport Heritage Museum
35. Canadian Sculpture Centre
36. Casa Loma
37. CBC Museum
38. Cedar Ridge Creative Centre
39. Design Exchange
40. Etobicoke Civic Centre Gallery
41. Gardiner Museum
42. Gibson House
43. The Grange
44. Hockey Hall of Fame
45. Koffler Centre of the Arts
46. Mackenzie House
47. Mercer Union
48. Morris and Sally Justein Heritage Museum
49. Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art
50. MZTV Museum of Television
51. Ontario Science Centre
52. Open Studio Gallery
53. Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books
54. Parliament Interpretive Centre
55. Power Plant
56. Queen's Own Rifles of Canada Regimental Museum
57. Reuben & Helene Dennis Museum
58. Royal Canadian Military Institute Museum
59. Royal Regiment of Canada Museum
60. Taras Shevchenko Museum
61. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library

62. Toronto Police Museum and Discovery Centre
63. Toronto Railway Museum
64. Toronto Reference Library
65. Toronto Scottish Regiment Museum
66. Toronto Sculpture Garden
67. Toronto's First Post Office
68. Ukrainian Museum of Canada Ontario Branch

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_museums_in_Toronto, Accessed, March 2, 2015