

Cultural Fulfillment

This domain captures metrics that measure opportunities that afford people and communities access to fulfilling their cultural needs. Indicators are multi-faceted and may represent cultural interests, cultural identity, and/or connection to nature (i.e., visits to national parks). Cultural indicators encompass values-driven metrics that examine the concepts of the “self” that centers around vital interconnections with others and the environment (Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health 2009).



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While there are many variations of the specific definition, few would argue the important role of spirituality and culture within populations. Cultural values are in many ways integral to vital communities yet are rarely considered in most well-being indices. Investment in museums, cultural centers, and other similar gathering places offer educational opportunities to help mitigate inequities typical of cultural exclusion. Faith- and community-based activities such as festivals, concerts, arts and crafts shows, etc. further strengthen social cohesion by preserving cultural and spiritual heritage. Moreover, it is the environmental “culture” that is often the harmonizing factor that supports community vitality when obvious economic disparity would otherwise cause discord (“A Tale of Two Aspens” 2011).

Relationship to Ecosystem Services:

Cultural ecosystem services represent the “non material benefits people obtain from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation, and aesthetic experiences” (MEA 2005, p. 40). For many populations, culture and spirituality are strongly connected with the environment. Swan and Raphael (1995) noted that Aboriginal Australians holistically view “health” as harmonized, inter-relating factors that include spiritual, environmental, ideological as well as mental and physical aspects that, collectively, are identified as “cultural well-being”. The social, sacred, and cultural aspects of ecosystems significantly contribute to Native American well-being, but are often overlooked in qualitative assessments. Native Americans seek cultural and spiritual fulfillment by communing with nature, praying and meditating, fishing and hunting, collecting herbs, and conducting vision quests or other ceremonies (Burger 2011).



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The interwoven relationship between humans and the landscape is manifested in cultural diversity and heritage, educational values and ecological knowledge, social relations and sense of place (MEA 2005, Rössler 2006, Schaich et al. 2010). The tangible and intangible heritage associated with the human nature interface is tightly coupled with people’s involvement in environmental conservation (Philips 1998). Thus it follows that cultural and spiritual fulfillment is influenced by our connection to natural systems and opportunity to identify with our heritage through visits to natural historical sites, national parks and celebrations revolving around