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## Beyond Livability (ArtPlace blog)

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## Beyond Livability (ArtPlace blog)

### Abstract

Mark Stern wrote this blog post in December 2011 as part of CultureBlocks, the Philadelphia cultural assets mapping project, funded by the NEA's Our Town Program and ArtPlace America.

### Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Public Policy | Social Welfare | Urban Studies and Planning

### Comments

This blog was a product of the partnership of Reinvestment Fund and PolicyMap; the City of Philadelphia Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy (OACCE) and Department of Commerce; and the University of Pennsylvania, Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) with support by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA Our Town Program) and ArtPlace America.

## Beyond Livability (ArtPlace blog)

By Mark J. Stern, December 2011

One of the major inspirations of the Our Town and ArtPlace grants has been the enhancement of *livability*. On a practical level, this focus is part of a strategy to link cultural funding more closely with wider initiatives of the Federal government in the areas of sustainable development, smart growth, and transit-oriented development.

To the extent that livability is a policy perspective, it is anchored in the *livability principles* adapted by Partnership for Sustainable Communities created by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2009. These principles include:

**Provide more transportation choices.** Develop safe, reliable, and economical transportation choices to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote public health.

**Promote equitable, affordable housing.** Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.

**Enhance economic competitiveness.** Improve economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access to employment centers, educational opportunities, services and other basic needs by workers, as well as expanded business access to markets.

**Support existing communities.** Target federal funding toward existing communities—through strategies like transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling—to increase community revitalization and the efficiency of public works investments and safeguard rural landscapes.

**Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.** Align federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth, including making smart energy choices such as locally generated renewable energy.

**Value communities and neighborhoods.** Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods—rural, urban, or suburban.

Yet, the focus on livability should be seen as a starting point, not the final goal of creative place-making. The most significant shortcoming of livability as a perspective is its relative silence on issues of social justice and inclusion. Although livability should improve the lives of *all* Americans, we must be mindful that for the past generation, private markets and public policy have directed a disproportionate share of social and economic benefits toward a small, privileged part of the population. If livability improves all of our lives without specifically focusing on the harm done to the lives the poorest and socially excluded Americans, it will serve to preserve social injustice and exclusion even if it achieves these goals.

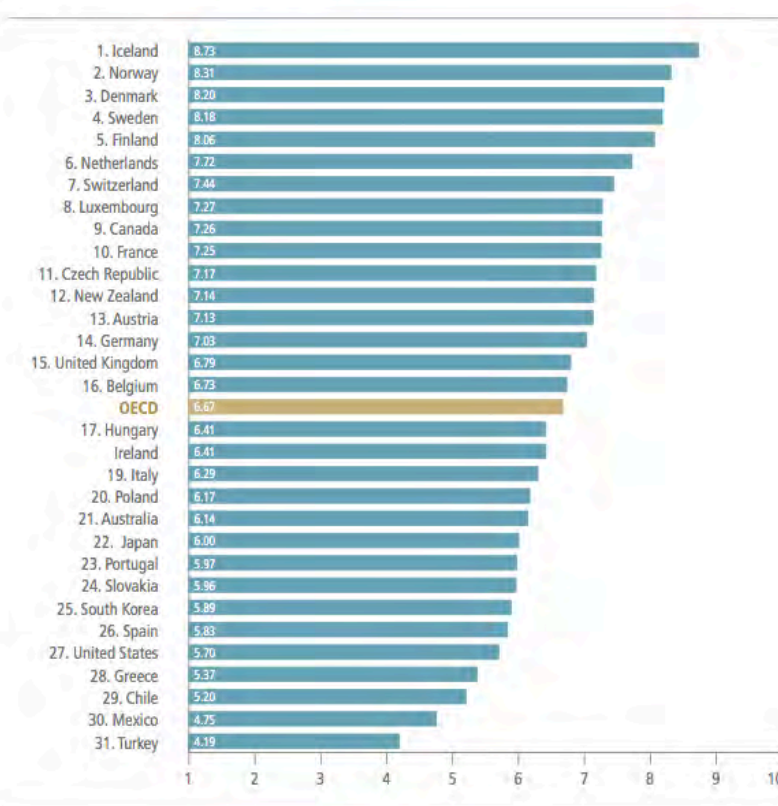
Fortunately, there are many efforts afoot internationally that provide guidance in *incorporating a social justice perspective into livability*. In 2009, the European Commission issued a study of poverty and social exclusion in the European Community based on a multidimensional view of social well-being. This perspective was amplified in the Report by the Commission on the

Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress in 2010. That report identified the following dimensions for inclusion in a more comprehensive measure of social well-being:

- i. Material living standards (income, consumption and wealth);
- ii. Health;
- iii. Education;
- iv. Personal activities including work
- v. Political voice and governance;
- vi. Social connections and relationships;
- vii. Environment (present and future conditions);
- viii. Insecurity, of an economic as well as a physical nature

Along similar lines, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently released a study of social justice in its member nations that underlined the relative failure of the United States. Of the 31 member nations, the US ranked twenty-seventh, better only than Turkey, Mexico, Chile, and Greece.

Figure 1a: Social Justice (weighted index)



As part of the Philadelphia cultural mapping project—a collaboration of The Reinvestment Fund, the City of Philadelphia, and the University of Pennsylvania—we plan to develop a livability index for the city that goes beyond current scholarship in two respects. First, it will draw on these international examples by using a definition of livability that explicitly incorporates issues of social inclusion and social justice. Second, it will develop these measures not only for the city as a whole, but also for its neighborhoods. During the spring semester, Ira Goldstein of TRF and

Mark Stern of the University of Pennsylvania will be teaching an Urban Studies class at Penn that will develop the first version of this index. Our hope is that we will develop a social inclusion/livability index that will complement TRF's market value analysis (MVA). MVA combines a variety of data on housing markets with qualitative observation to categorize the city's neighborhoods. These data can then be used to identify emerging problems and to match policy initiatives with the specific challenges faced by neighborhoods. We expect the livability/social inclusion index to provide another way of understanding the problems faced by Philadelphia's neighborhoods and the types of efforts by government, business, and civil society that can address them.

