Practitioner's Guide:

Regional Profile
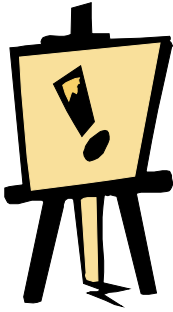
Regional Profile

Brief Description

There are different types of regional profiles, which vary according to the nature of the region and the reasons why the profile is being undertaken. Examples of regional profiles include:

▶ A study of the demographic, social, physical, economic and environmental characteristics of a region or defined area (e.g. provincial, regional or local Government). The study may identify the needs of the people living in the study area as well as the opportunities for future development and the constraints that might impede development.

▶ An analysis of a group within the community that share a common characteristic e.g. youth, migrants, poor.

▶ A profile prepared for, or by, a regional or even a community based organisation to examine its internal operation and its relationship to the wider community.

In each case the regional profile identifies the current state of the people and the resources in a region and also identified areas that could be developed to maintain and/or improve the quality of life for those in the region. Creating a regional profile is an important step in developing a regional development plan.

A Team of Planners developing a regional profile

Regional Profile

Proposed Main Users

Regional profiles are used by planners, communities, land developers, and prospective business investors to help them understand a region, or to undertake a feasibility study for potential investment in the region

Purpose of the Method

A regional profile is necessary to identify the future needs of people living in the region, province or community and its potential for development. Producing a regional profile provides the essential information base required for effective regional planning.

A regional profile is an important tool in the planning of:

▶ Regional and local physical infrastructure, such as roads, buildings, sewerage, etc

▶ Regional and local business and industrial development

▶ Regional and local community services, such schools, health centres, hospitals etc., and

▶ Regional and local environmental management, such as waste disposal, location of industry, etc.

The regional governments or councils or regional planning units can prepare regional profiles. The profiles are prepared with assistance from all relevant government organizations, regional development committees or a private consultant. Involving the local community as much as possible in an active way in a profile will help the people in the region to understand the results and make use of the findings.

Regional Profile

Advantages

Collecting the information required for a regional profile can have important benefits for the organisation that undertakes or initiates the regional community profile. It can:

▶ Help the organisation to better understand the region in which it is working

▶ Introduce the organisation to the people living in the region or increase its profile and awareness of its services

▶ Identify issues, problems and needs of residents or clients living in the region enhance the skills of the organisation in working with the communities living in the region and make it more effective in bringing about desired changes

▶ Identify key individuals or influential groups within the region or community who can make useful allies (or protagonists)

▶ Foster cooperation amongst different agencies and groups of people (or, if poorly handled, set them apart competing for scarce resources)

▶ Help prevent wastage of human, material and financial resources by helping to ensure actions are appropriate and effective

▶ Assist the organisation to effectively target its efforts to a specific group in a suitable manner

▶ Foster community participation, involving people from a wide cross section of the community working on common problems in the region

▶ Help to monitor the results of a particular programme or action, and assist the organisation to take corrective or preventative action as required

Limitations

▶ Regional profiles require hard-data and cannot be based upon assertions. Gathering such data is both a costly and time-consuming exercise

▶ Data accuracy can severely limit the value and use of regional profiles

▶ A comprehensive regional profile requires a lot of data to be gathered, however, data can be gathered in a modular approach to reduce costs

▶ Storage, access and presentation of regional profiles requires effective presentation skills in order to avoid presenting too much unnecessary information and data

▶ Unless the data is made generally available the benefits of the regional profile will be limited only to the planning unit

▶ Updating and maintaining the accuracy of the data has to be done regularly if the regional profiles are to remain current

Regional Profile

Principles and General Procedures
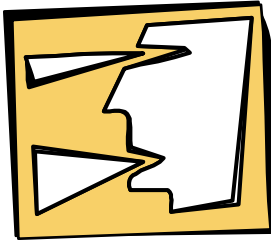
It is easy to be overwhelmed by the task of conducting a regional profile. The amount of information available is enormous, and it is an easy trap to gather information, which, while it may be interesting, doesn't have any real value for regional profile. To avoid these pitfalls, ask the following:

Why Are You Creating a Regional Profile?

Is the profile being created for a particular issue or regional based organisation? What needs to be known? Is a two or three page regional overview needed for people outside the region, or is a detailed regional analysis required? It is a good idea to be clear as to why you need this information. Who will use it and when will it be needed?

What Do You Already Know?

Identify what information is available to identify the 'gaps' in what is needed to understand the region. A broad range of data may already exist which may provide some of the answers to issues that need to be addressed.

What Resources Do You Have?

How long do you have to complete the regional profile and who can help? What are the likely costs and who will pay? Gathering information takes time and money. There are also costs in printing the profile and distributing it to the stakeholders. In collecting information for a regional profile, it is often a good idea to plan a sequence for gathering your data.

Collect hard data first and soft data last.

Hard data refers to objective factors and figures that may already have been collected by others. It's possible that the answers to a question may already be known, eliminating the need to conduct a new survey or questionnaire. Collecting such information first may also provide ideas for questions that can then be checked out by 'soft data' - the personal impressions or surveys of the people that have to be contacted later.

Presenting the Results.

An important consideration in completing the regional profile should be how the planner proposes to communicate the results to the people, stakeholders and organisations. It is important that the document is produced as an independent document that is readily available to interested people. The profile must be presented in a way that is easy to follow, and is clear and concise. If the report includes a lot of data and survey findings, it may be useful to produce an executive summary for public distribution.

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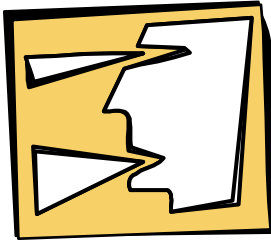
A regional profile could include information in the following areas:

1. Overview

What are the characteristics of the region? What are its boundaries? What is the time frame of the profile?

The first task in constructing a regional profile is to undertake an overview of the region. This helps to provide a context in which to place more detailed information about the region collected later in the study. The overview can be viewed as 'setting the scene' of the study. The overview should include a brief description of the regions:

▶ history
▶ geographic location
▶ traditions
▶ regional and community networks
▶ main transport and communication links
▶ key features
▶ importance to the region, State and nation
▶ similarities and dissimilarities with neighbouring regions

Such material may already exist in a range of areas - Local Government guides, community handbooks, council records, regional profiles, tourist brochures etc. The overview need not contain detailed information but it should give a perspective on the uniqueness of the region, its place in a national sense, and a general picture of its current status in respect to development - stable, growing, or in decline.

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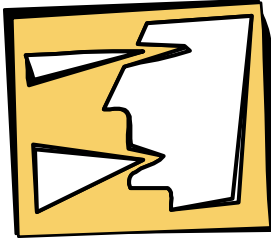
2. Local Environment

What is the nature of the local environment? Is it constant or changing? What activities does it permit or prohibit?

Look at the physical nature of the environment in which the people in the region live and operate. What kinds of activities does it permit or prohibit? Is the environment changing in ways to make some of these activities more or less viable than others? What can be done to accommodate or alter these trends? Do these changes have consequences for other systems or elements within the region? This area establishes the base from which to see what opportunities are present or absent in the region, they may include (if relevant for the region):

▶ The physical resources for agriculture, timber, fishing and mining
▶ The availability and suitability of the land
▶ Condition and stock of environmental and community assets
▶ Management of wastes and litter
▶ Land degradation
▶ Salinity
▶ Pests, Chemical use
▶ Deforestation
▶ Coastal management
▶ Saltation of rivers, creeks, inlets etc
▶ Rare fauna or flora

The investigation should determine any problems and constraints facing the region as well as any opportunities to address these problems regionally or locally.

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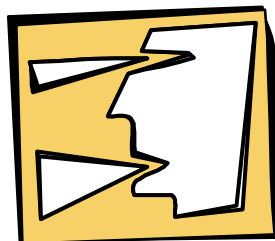
3. Population Characteristics

What age, gender and ethnic groupings are found in the community? How is the population changing?

The second task in constructing a regional profile is to identify the size and characteristics of the resident population. Key aspects for which information may be collected include:

- ▶ **Population trends**: present, past and future population size, calculated growth rates and reasons for any apparent trends
- ▶ **Age and sex structure**: number in various age groups e.g. 0-4, 5-9 etc, changes over time to detect trends, e.g. aging population, calculated median age, sex ratio, dependency ratio
- ▶ **Ethnicity**: place of origin, age, sex, occupation and language and possibly religion
- ▶ **Mobility**: extent of migration into and out of the region and local community including place of origin/destination
- ▶ **Family structure**: incidence of different family types e.g. single parents, family size, single people, etc.
- ▶ **Education**: educational qualifications, full time students, etc
- ▶ **Income**: calculated median income for individual, household or family income, and incidence of poverty
- ▶ **Law and order**: incidence and type of criminal offences, age/sex of offenders

4. Labour Market

What information on occupations and employment is available? Is this changing? In what ways and with what effects?

An investigation of the local labour market is generally undertaken to obtain details of the employment structure of the region, i.e. the size and characteristics of the workforce, of unemployed workers, as well as the availability and type of jobs. Specific aspects for which information is normally collected include:

- ▶ Size, sex and age of workforce
- ▶ Workforce participation rates for males and females
- ▶ Occupation and industry of the workforce
- ▶ Number and percentage of unemployed persons
- ▶ Characteristics of the unemployed: age, sex, ethnic origin, and duration of unemployment
- ▶ Number, type and location of job vacancies, and
- ▶ Travel to work movements

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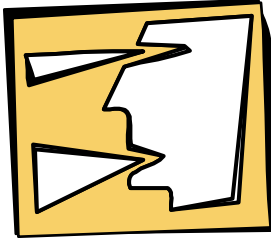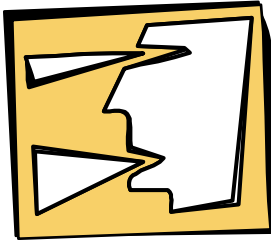
5. Social Infrastructure

What social, educational, medical, recreational, cultural or political institutions impact upon the communities living in the region?

An important step in constructing a regional profile is to identify all organisations and services/facilities that provide for the welfare of people living in the region. Through this process it is possible to determine whether any excess capacity, shortages or gaps exist in service provision. As a first step an inventory is compiled of:

▶ **Community and religious organisations**: religious organizations, sporting groups, service clubs, cultural groups, youth groups and other community organizations
▶ **Professional services**: medical, health, dental, veterinary, accountants, legal, fire brigade, postal, police, media etc.
▶ **Government services (Commonwealth, State and Local)**: health, community services, agriculture etc.
▶ **Education**: pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, tertiary institutions, community education etc.
▶ **Community health and welfare services**: child health, school and community health, speech therapy, home and community care etc.

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6. Physical Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure comprises roads, water supply, electricity, telecommunications, airports, ports. What physical elements are important in the region?
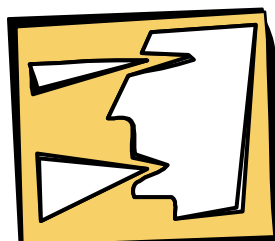
An investigation of physical infrastructure in the region will include:

- **Land use and land tenure**: urban and town planning schemes, rural strategy, development control, broad land use and tenure of major land areas etc.
- **Residential development**: number, type, cost and ownership of occupied and unoccupied dwellings, vacant land, dwelling commencements and demolitions etc.
- **Commercial development**: number, type and ownership of occupied and unoccupied commercial premises, vacant commercial land, cost of land etc.
- **Industrial development**: number, type and ownership of industries, serviced and unserviced industrial land, etc.
- **Reserves**: size, type and location of developed and undeveloped reserves etc.
- **Community buildings**: size, type, ownership and standard of occupied and unoccupied community buildings etc.
- **Water supply**: type, extent and quality of present and future supplies etc.
- **Sewerage:** extent, current system used etc.
- **Electricity and gas supplies**: availability, consumption, extent of service, energy conservation strategies etc.
- **Transport**: road, rail, air, coastal networks and facilities, storage depots etc.

An analysis of the current use, availability, quality and cost of physical infrastructure will provide an indication of the adequacy and appropriateness of facilities to meet the present and future needs of the region.

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7. Economic Infrastructure

How does the region generate its income? Where does it expend its wealth? How is wealth distributed?

This section of the community profile provides a description and analysis of the local economy. It should provide an indication of the current diversity and viability of the local economy, opportunities for the creation of new business and/or the expansion of existing business, problems and constraints to local business which can be addressed locally and possible local solutions to resolve problems. Information sought usually includes:

▶ **Number and type of business and industry -** estimates can be made on which industries export to neighbouring regions, and which are imported
▶ **Legal structure**
▶ **Ownership -** number of self-employed or employers
▶ **Business stability -** figures exist on total turnover for retail and manufacturing businesses
▶ **Employment -** total number of the work force, wages paid in retailing and manufacturing, labour force participation, part time and full time, and unemployment figures are available
▶ **Workforce skills –** e.g. levels and types of training and education achieved
▶ **Origin of materials**
▶ **Extent of service catchment area**
▶ **Major problems and constraints affecting regional business**
▶ **Services/products not catered for by regional business**
▶ **Possible solutions to problems**

References and Sources Used

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