

Opportunity Mapping



Background

Definition

A neighborhood's social, physical, and economic conditions can have enormous impacts on the life outcomes of community members. These neighborhood conditions are the essence of "opportunity"—defined as "a situation or condition that places individuals in a position to be more likely to succeed and excel." ([Equity, Opportunity, And Sustainability In The Central Puget Sound Region: Geography Of Opportunity In The Central Puget Sound Region](#), 2012) Mapping access to opportunity ("Opportunity Mapping") is a research tool that measures various neighborhood indicators to understand where neighborhoods of opportunity exist and assess who has access to them.

The [Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity](#), who developed the methodology for Opportunity Mapping and has led opportunity analysis efforts across the country, explains the framework in the following terms:

An extensive body of research has established that neighborhood conditions and proximity to opportunities such as high performing education or sustainable employment have a critical impact on quality of life and self-advancement. The central premise of opportunity mapping is that residents of a metropolitan area are situated within an interconnected web of opportunities that shape their quality of life. Opportunity mapping provides an analytical framework to measure opportunity comprehensively in metropolitan regions and determine who has access to opportunity rich areas. Opportunity mapping also provides a framework to assess what factors are limiting opportunity in a community and can assist in identifying what measures are needed to remedy these impediments to opportunity.

Health, equity, and sustainability considerations

There are many direct health and equity considerations in the Opportunity Mapping framework, both in terms of indicators measured and policy implementations. The following text from the central Puget Sound region's [Opportunity Mapping analysis](#) (2012) succinctly captures how health and equity serve as the underlying principles for the analysis:

[Opportunity Mapping] is based on two premises: (1) All people should have fair access to the critical opportunity structures and the necessary social infrastructure to succeed in life. (2) Connecting people to opportunity creates positive, transformative change in communities. The Communities of Opportunity model advocates for a fair investment in all people and neighborhoods, to improve life outcomes for all citizens, and to improve the health of entire regions.

Because no single factor contributes solely to the success or marginalization of a community or demographic group, the Opportunity Map methodology examines many different health and equity measures—such as high rates of incarceration, neighborhood disinvestment, housing barriers, educational and early childhood challenges, and labor market discrimination—that may act in

combination to restrict access to opportunities and severely limit the individual and collective ability to build assets.

In addition, access to opportunity is a sustainability issue. Sustainable growth that is sensitive to the needs of marginalized populations makes urban communities areas more attractive to wide range of people by addressing the social, economic and environmental quality of places where people live. Inclusive and thriving communities that attract future growth may result in many environmental benefits including decreases in greenhouse gas emissions, improved air and water quality, and a reduction in pressure to convert rural and resource lands.

Program and Policy Examples

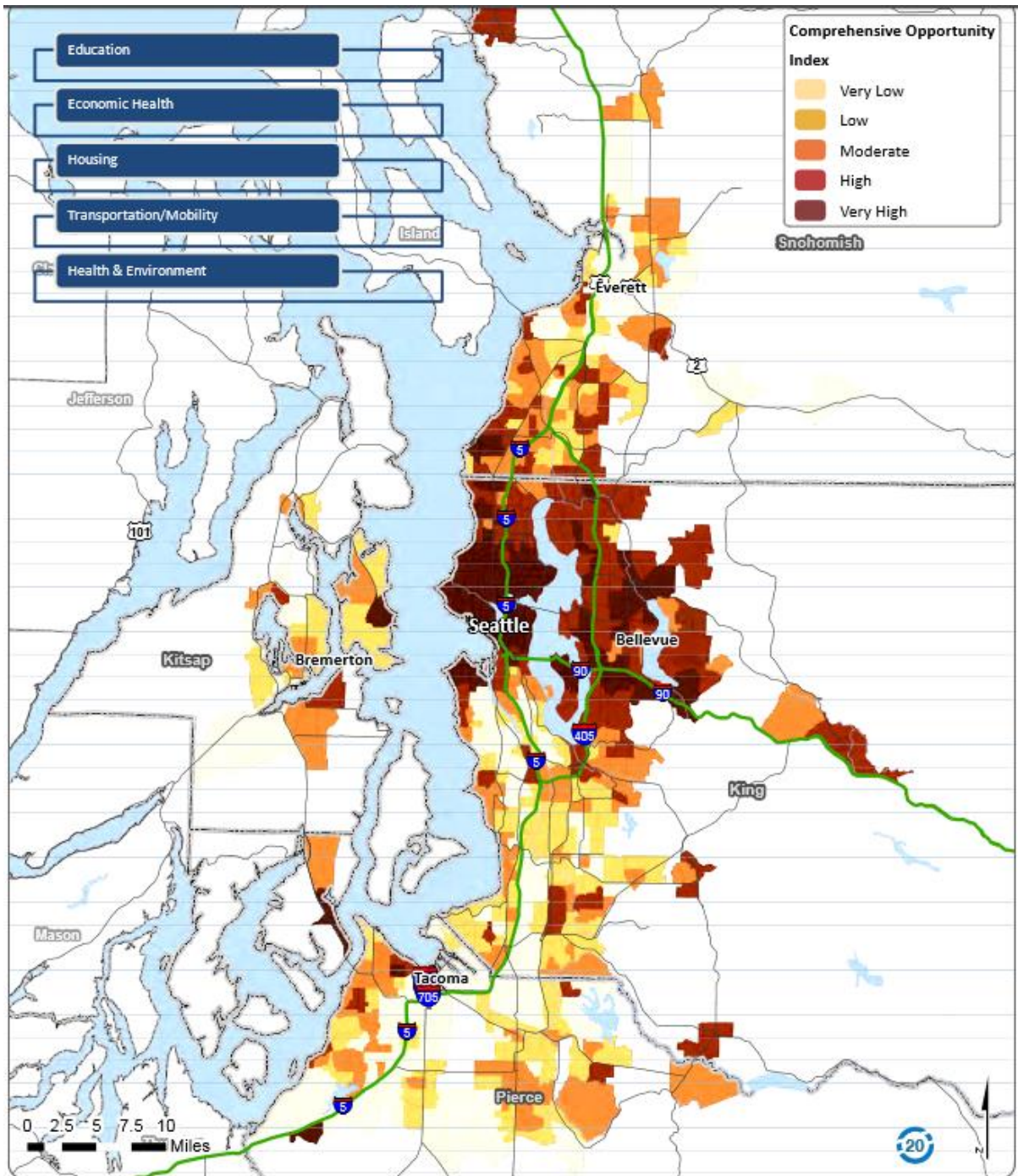
Program example: *Growing Transit Communities Partnership*

The Puget Sound Regional Council partnered with the Kirwan Institute in 2012 to analyze access to opportunity in the four-county central Puget Sound region. The work was completed as part of the Growing Transit Communities Partnership, a three-year effort supported by a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The analysis examined a total of 20 indicators across five sub-measures of opportunity—education, economic health, housing and neighborhood quality, mobility and transportation, and health and environment. See the following figure for the complete list of indicators.

Education	Economic Health	Housing and Neighborhood Quality	Mobility and Transportation	Health and Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • math test scores • reading test scores • student poverty • teacher qualification • graduation rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access to living wage jobs • job growth trends, 2000–2010 • unemployment rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vacancy rate • foreclosure rate • high cost loan rate • housing stock condition • crime index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cost per commute • proximity to express bus stops • average transit fare • percent of commuters who walk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distance to nearest park or open space • proximity to toxic waste release • percent of area that is within a food desert

Central Puget Sound Region Opportunity Sub-Measures and Data Indicators

The resulting report, [Equity, Opportunity and Sustainability in the Central Puget Sound Region](#) (2012), documents disparities in access to opportunity in the region, provides maps for each opportunity sub-measure, and uses graphical overlays to illustrate the intersection of access to opportunity with a number of additional community characteristics, such as race and housing cost-burden. An [interactive web-based mapping tool](#) allows users to view neighborhood-level data for each of the 20 indicators and thematic overlays. See the map below for the Comprehensive Opportunity Index results for the central Puget Sound region.



Central Puget Sound Region Comprehensive Access to Opportunity Index Results, 2012

The central Puget Sound region Opportunity Mapping analysis generated four major recommendations:

- Leverage the success of HUD site-based affordable housing near high opportunity areas to promote economic mobility of low-income residents
- Use the [opportunity] map to help voucher holders move to areas with access to opportunity

- Emphasize linkages between areas of low and high opportunity as the Sound Transit Regional Transit Plans (ST2) are implemented
- Invest in the fundamentals of opportunity to improve access for current and future neighborhood residents.

Since its completion in 2012, the Opportunity Mapping analysis has been used to help inform plans and investments at the regional level. For example:

- The Growing Transit Communities Partnership used Opportunity Mapping results in a [People + Place Implementation Typology](#) that linked specific implementation strategies to each of 74 transit communities based on their physical and social characteristics. The Opportunity Mapping contributed to a community's "People Profile" that measured the degree to which a transit community's social infrastructure supports a community context in which residents may succeed and thrive (Access to Opportunity) and the likelihood that growth pressures will present a risk of displacement and other negative impacts on communities (Displacement Risk). The People Profile has been used to inform implementation strategies such as community needs assessments and monitoring, affordable housing preservation and production strategies, and community stabilization and revitalization efforts.
- The Opportunity Mapping analysis has also been used to inform prioritization of regional transportation projects. The 2014 update to [Transportation 2040](#), the region's long-range transportation plan, included a comprehensive prioritization process to balance the transportation financial plan with key VISION 2040 policy objectives. "Social equity and access to opportunity," one of nine measures used to evaluate projects, used the Opportunity Mapping results to address "the extent to which projects improve mobility and/or reduce negative impact to minority, low income, elderly, youth, people with disabilities, and non-vehicle owning populations, and whether they support access to opportunities."

Implementation

Considerations for local implementation

Local jurisdictions and community organizations may use the data from Opportunity Mapping in many ways. For example, the City of Tacoma has included Opportunity Mapping data in their subarea plan for the North Downtown area in order to illustrate community needs. The City of Seattle has used Opportunity Mapping data as part of personnel trainings on race and equity issues.

Broadly speaking, Opportunity Mapping analyses may illustrate disparities between communities or demographic groups, and inform community planning and investments. Local implementation from Opportunity Mapping analyses may include more detailed community needs assessments to understand the root causes of disparities, transportation and housing investments to improve equitable access to opportunity-rich communities, and targeted community investments to address needs in areas of lower access to opportunity.

In addition to the methodology by the Kirwan Institute and specific data set, there are other ways local jurisdictions are looking at these issues. For example:

- The [King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks](#) carried out an equity assessment for its major lines of business. The assessment utilized Geographic Information Systems to map how

selected services and facilities relate to basic demographic conditions. This comparison helps to identify and address the relative fairness in distribution of benefits and burdens across the service areas, with the goal of reducing racial or income-based inequity associated with facilities and programs.

Resources

Kirwan Institute's [Opportunity Mapping Initiative and Project Listing Resource Page](#) (2013)

Kirwan Institute's [Place Matters: Using Mapping to Plan for Opportunity, Equity, and Sustainability](#)

Kirwan Institute's [The Geography of Opportunity: Mapping to Promote Equitable Community Development and Fair Housing in King County, WA](#) (2010)

PolicyLink's [Community Mapping for Health Equity Advocacy](#) (2009)

Public Health—Seattle & King County's [Community Health Indicators](#) (2014)

Puget Sound Regional Council Growing Transit Communities' [Opportunity Mapping Resource Page](#) (2013)