Culture in sustainable communities – a Canada-Europe Comparative Research Project

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Outline

- Rise of the sustainability paradigm
- Challenges of linking culture and community sustainability planning
- Comparison of European and Canadian situations
- Canadian approaches
- What the research hopes to accomplish
Rise of sustainability paradigm

Four-pillar model of sustainability – an influential model to conceptually and operationally integrate culture in sustainability planning.

Four-pillar model of sustainability includes:
- Cultural vitality
- Environmental responsibility
- Economic health
- Social equity
Challenges of linking culture and community sustainability planning

“Systems approach” missing in most community sustainability plans due to Western tendency to silo and divide rather than think holistically.

Conceptually, the role of culture is still uncertain.

Operationally, integrated approach to developing and implementing plans is still a challenge.
Culture and sustainable communities in Europe

- Agenda 21 for Culture is one of the main drivers.
- Has informed or influenced planning in a number of cities (e.g. Lille, Barcelona, Lyon).
- Concepts not explained in detail.
- Not a real agenda.
- No monitoring of cities after adoption.
Culture and sustainable communities in Canada – Agenda 21

- 2009 - Government of Québec adopted Agenda 21 for Culture in
- 2010-2011 - series of regional consultations held
- Several Québec municipalities have adopted Agenda 21 as blueprint for local sustainable development
Culture and sustainable communities in Canada - Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs)

- 2005 – Federal government introduced Gas Tax Agreements to transfer a portion of gasoline revenues with municipalities
- Transfers conditional upon preparation of ICSPs – overarching documents to align municipal plans and policies under one integrated decision-making framework based on the four-pillar model
- Communities in most Canadian provinces outside of Québec have begun to develop ICSPs to access Gas Tax money
Examples
Canadian conceptualizations of culture’s role in sustainability

Conceptually, an initial analysis of ICSPs in small cities typically found cultural considerations linked to:

- Community identity, distinctiveness, attractiveness and “sense of place”
- Sociability, public participation, voluntarism and social networks
ICSPs – Linkage of culture and sustainability

Rationalization of culture’s inclusion by communities in their ICSPs was two-fold:

- As assets to be exploited in tourism-related economic development, community attractiveness, downtown revitalization and the city/town’s regional role

- As assets promoting quality of life, community engagement and social cohesion, collective identity, and as a means of addressing social issues (such as diversity)

Interesting theme of culture as central to a “way of life” in a few communities
ICSPs - Operational challenges

Operationally, integration of culture into sustainability planning was often minimal:

- Action plans did not prioritize cultural items
- Culture-related items in economic and social sustainability contexts were often “minor” suggestions
- Concrete actions on the cultural components were often delayed
- Culture-specific actions often seemed rudimentary
- Culture-related ideas, visions and plans seemed undermined by limited municipal resources
Canada-Europe comparative research context

- Governments of Canada and Québec internationally recognized as leaders for development of ICSPs and for adoption of culture as cornerstone of sustainable development
- Europe further advanced in integrating culture into community planning, but “sustainability” aspect often lacking
- Research needed to improve conceptualization of culture within sustainability paradigm and to advance planning and policy development on both sides of Atlantic
Canada-Europe comparative research objectives

To examine how overarching policy frameworks in the areas of culture/heritage, cities/infrastructure and environment influence local community sustainability planning.

To identify key conceptual and policy pathways that enable culturally sensitive city and community sustainable development.
Thank you!

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