Telling the Story of Place: Cultural Mapping as Thick Description

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Outline of presentation

- Mapping tangible and intangible cultural assets
- Methodological challenges in mapping intangible cultural assets
- Community case studies
- Critical reflections
Cultural mapping in Canada

- Used primarily as a tool for development and planning
- Defined as “a process of collecting, recording, analyzing, and synthesizing information in order to describe the cultural resources, networks, links and patterns of usage of a given community or group”. (Stewart, *Cultural Mapping Toolkit*, 2007)
Types of cultural resources

Tangible cultural resources
- Cultural industries
- Cultural occupations
- Community cultural organizations
- Cultural facilities and spaces
- Cultural and natural heritage
- Cultural events and festivals

Intangible cultural resources
- Values, stories, customs, traditions
## Development of online digital maps by size of community (N=64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of community</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Planned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (N=26)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (N=15)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (N=23)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Stated purpose of cultural mapping by size of community (N=64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Small (N=26)</th>
<th>Medium (N=15)</th>
<th>Large (N=23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated or cultural planning</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development, urban/rural development</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism, branding, marketing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity, heritage, sustainability</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access, awareness, promotion of equity or diversity</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodological challenges

- Ontario’s Municipal Cultural Planning Inc. published well-known guide for mapping tangible cultural resources in 2010.
- Used North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and North American Occupational Classification System (NOCS) codes to identify assets.
Recent research in field of environmental management has suggested an approach to mapping intangibles based on:

- Articulation or narrative expressions of experience
- Open-ended classification – categories defined by community
- Assignment of relative importance by community
- Recognition of spatial relevance (place-based nature of intangibles)
Case studies – Narrative expressions of experience and meaning

- The “DNA of culture”
- Tap into lay expertise in the community where knowledge is not codified but transmitted informally
- Provide “thick description” by recognizing the complex web of knowledge and meaning underlying a community’s cultural assets.
- Difficult to incorporate into the average municipal cultural plan
Intangible narratives in digital cultural maps


- Medium-sized community – Town of Georgina (pop. 43,517) - http://www.georginamaps.ca/

- Large community – County of Essex and City of Windsor (pop. 388,782) - http://www.culture.windsor-essex.info/
Municipality of Wawa (pop. 2,975)

- Facebook page set up to allow residents to post information
- Conventional “Google-type” map pinpoints tangible cultural assets
- YouTube video tells the story of place in pictures and music ([http://wawaculture.com/the-project/](http://wawaculture.com/the-project/))
Town of Georgina (pop. 43,517)

- Developed by a citizen-led organization concerned about uncontrolled development
- Narrative took two forms – a conventional book and a website (http://www.georgina maps.ca/)
Town of Georgina (pop. 43,517)
County of Essex and City of Windsor (pop. 388,782)

- Conventional mapping website (*One Region, Countless Stories*) incorporates links to stories related to category.
This link on the “Spaces and Facilities” section leads to a video of an artist discussing the unique opportunities for the arts in Windsor (http://www.youtube.com/embed/3QWmqWItdlA?autoplay=1&hd=1&KeepThis=true&TB_iframe=true&height=345&width=560?autoplay=1&hd=1)
Narrative an effective tool in mapping intangible cultural assets

Difficult to link to official cultural websites or portals

Descriptions tend to be “thin” unless residents given opportunity to assign relative importance or to creatively re-examine them
Thank you!

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