The Role of ‘Cultural Resources’ in Community Sustainability: Linking Concepts to Practice and Planning

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Workshop to explore …

Linkages between creative, artistic, and heritage resources and community sustainability:

● What do cultural resources contribute to community sustainability?
● How can artistic expression, projects and processes relate to sustainability planning and related initiatives?
Presentation overview

- What are ‘cultural resources’?
- ‘Cultural vitality’ and ‘cultural sustainability’
- The arts and creative practices as resources for community sustainability planning
- Canadian and European approaches to the conceptualization of culture within community sustainability planning
(1)

“the ambiguous relationship between culture, development and sustainability”
1. Cultural resources – An emerging element in sustainability planning

- Inclusion of culture within sustainability dialogues is emergent and clustered around different foci.
- There have been at least three main phases of conceptual development over the past 12 years and the concept has emerged in a number of places globally.
- Our research on culture in sustainability planning has examined policies, practices and approaches in Canada, Europe and elsewhere.
Three phases

Phase 1 – 2000-2002
Initial initiatives to differentiate ‘culture’ from ‘social’

Phase 2 – 2004-2006
Closely or directly informed by the earlier developments, primarily focusing on local development

Phase 3 – 2008 –
Expanded actors and a new wave of attention to advancing the place of culture within sustainability, especially at national and international levels
Perspectives on cultural resources in sustainable communities

- Culture as capital (both tangible and intangible)
- Culture as a way of life (a system of social relations)
- Culture as a vehicle for sustainable values
- Culture as creative expression providing insights on sustainability
- Culture as an adaptive process grounded in complexity and interdependence
What are cultural resources?

- “Cultural resources are the **raw material of the city** and its value base; its **assets** replacing coal, steel or gold. Creativity is the method of exploiting these resources and helping them grow. The task of urban planners is to recognize, manage and exploit these resources responsibly.” (Charles Landry 2005)

- “Understanding culture and cultural activity as **resources for human and community development**, rather than merely as cultural “products” to be subsidized because they are good for us, unlocks possibilities of inestimable value. And when our understanding of culture is inclusive and broader than the traditionally Eurocentric vision of “high culture,” then we have increased the assets with which we can address civic goals.” (Russo & Butler 2007)
Important conceptual influences

Important practice influences

- Canada’s Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs) – based on ‘four-pillar’ model
- New Zealand’s Long-Term Council Community Planning process (LTCCP) – based on ‘four well-beings’ model
- United Kingdom’s Leading the Good Life initiative (integration of planning for cultural development with community planning) – based on ‘quality of life’ model
- Heritage and sustainable development of historic (urban) centres (e.g. European Union’s URBACTII initiatives on heritage and urban development model, UNESCO sustainable development of historic centres)
- Eco-arts traditions and practices
Conflicting approaches ... neglect

- “The neglect of culture in SD can first result from conceptual difficulties, as the concept of culture, similar to that of sustainability and development, is multidisciplinary and ambiguous by nature and subject to fierce debate.”

(Soini 2009 – COST Action ‘Investigating Cultural Sustainability’ MOU)
Cultural sustainability

Cultural sustainability
i.e. attempts to transmit culture intergenerationally
(e.g. Bekerman & Kopelowitz 2008)

VS.

Culture in sustainability
i.e. roles of culture as aspect of broader societal sustainability;
including a cultural perspective on all developments
(e.g. Hawkes 2001, 2006: Nadarajah & Tomoko Yamamoto 2007; Nurse 2006)
+ Cultural vitality

- Emerging from cultural planning and benchmarking initiatives in Australia and USA, some Canadian applications – typically with focus on immediate and short- or medium-term

- Typically refers to:
  - Contemporary cultural expression and creativity
  - Opportunities for cultural engagement

- Other definitions: For Aboriginal communities (Australia), cultural vitality is: “the emotional strength, the spirit, the essence of people who strive and struggle to maintain strong identity and adapt to new and challenging environments, while they value the past and pass on distinctive cultural beliefs, practices and life ways.” (Eckermann et al. 2010)
“the ambiguous relationship between culture, development and sustainability”

… additional approaches, pathways, frameworks … ?
(2)

“What can cultural resources bring to community sustainable development?”
2. The arts and culture as resources for sustainability

“It has been recognized that as Canadian communities become increasingly diverse, culture plays an important role in building social cohesion, a sense of community and a shared value set that is rooted in local diversity. Cultural investments can reinforce place-based community development objectives related to employment and innovation, neighbourhood revitalization and environmental sustainability.”

(Infrastructure Canada – Integrated Community Sustainability Planning: A Background Paper, 2005)
Arts and culture contributions can include:

- Revitalization of neighbourhoods and enhancement of quality of place
- Building relationships and social capital through diverse and interlinked networks of cultural spaces and ecosystems
- Building community identity and pride
- Constructing linguistic or visual frames for articulating meaning and values around community sustainability
- Inspiring open, adaptive, participatory and creative governance models
- Creating economic opportunity and innovation
- Promoting cultural tourism
- Promoting personal development of residents
Artistic community - research initiatives

Radius of Art
Berlin, Germany
February 2012
‘community-based’/ ‘community-engaged’ arts practices

environmental-themed arts projects and practices
“What can cultural resources bring to community sustainable development?”

Examples …?
(3)

“What do planners and planning systems require to better integrate culture into sustainability planning?”
Our current comparative research examines:

- Leading initiatives by the Government of Canada (ICSPs) and the Province of Quebec to make culture a cornerstone of its sustainable development policy (‘Agenda 21 for Culture’)
  - Tend to only minimally integrate cultural considerations into overall visions and broader implementation initiatives
  - ‘Take up’ in communities varies

- European practices that integrate culture into city or community planning
  - Tend to exist separate from sustainable development planning
Canadian and European approaches to culture and sustainability – preliminary observations

- Culture-related planning and policy practices – still only weakly situated within sustainability context
- Holistic ‘systems approach’ – missing in most community sustainability plans
- Connections between culture-related planning and sustainability policy practices – slow to develop
- Multi-level governance processes – often impede ‘bottom-up’ planning exercises
Canadian and European approaches to culture and sustainability – preliminary observations

- Cultural component of plans – heavily reliant on local cultural knowledge networks, particularly ‘key actors’ in these networks
- Cultural issues – often slotted under social or economic pillars
- Implementation of cultural items – often neglected due to human or financial resource limitations
“What can cultural resources bring to community sustainable development?”

“What do planners and planning systems require to better integrate culture into sustainability planning?”
Thank you!

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