

Cultural Mapping Tools

CONNECTING PLACE, CULTURE, AND ECONOMY FOR THE CREATION OF LOCAL WEALTH

Greg Baeker

More and more Canadian municipalities understand that local wealth creation depends on better connecting planning for place, culture, and economy. Municipal cultural planning provides a framework for leveraging these connections, and is built on a systematic approach to identifying local cultural assets called cultural mapping.¹

What is Cultural Mapping?

Cultural mapping is a tool for identifying local cultural resources and deepening understanding of cultural systems using geographic information systems (GIS). A stronger knowledge base about culture in municipalities is needed for three reasons.

1. To inform planning and policy – Mapping strengthens the information base needed to make better, evidence-based decisions in cultural development.
2. To support economic development and tourism – Mapping helps strengthen marketing and promotion of local cultural assets to residents and visitors.
3. To expand access and participation – Mapping can create dynamic web-based maps as windows for local cultural content; for example, posting a podcast of a recent music festival, uploading images of local museum collections and significant heritage buildings, etc.



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Systematic Data

The problem in municipalities is not lack of information on culture. Rather, it is that information is collected by different people, for different reasons, and exists in different locations. Mapping begins not by collecting new information, but consolidating existing data in a consistent way using a Cultural Resource Framework (CRF). One framework includes the following categories of resources.

- ▶ creative cultural industries;
- ▶ community cultural organizations;
- ▶ spaces and facilities;
- ▶ cultural heritage;
- ▶ natural heritage; and
- ▶ festivals and events.

¹ Cultural mapping systems are currently in development in a diverse range of Ontario municipalities – from large urban, to mid-size, to small rural communities. These include Mississauga, Oakville, Durham Region, Niagara Region, Hamilton, Vaughan, Chatham-Kent, Oxford County and Prince Edward County.

Each category breaks down into multiple sub-categories or disciplines.²

The foundation of the CRF is Statistics Canada's *Canadian Framework of Cultural Statistics*.³ The framework reflects North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and National Occupational Classification (NOC) codes. The framework provides municipalities with consistent data structures, but also offers a series of strategic lenses to analyze local cultural systems. For example, it classifies cultural goods and services and locates them along a "creative chain" of creation, production, manufacturing, and distribution.

The CRF does not stop with Statistics Canada data. Additional layers of information are included, based on ways in which municipalities already collect information. For example, in Ontario, categories of natural and cultural heritage are defined by specific categories of heritage municipalities must maintain under the terms of the Ontario *Planning Act* and the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The key is not inventing new categories of data, but knitting together existing categories and taxonomies into coherent "super databases."

Spatial Mapping

A defining feature of municipal cultural planning is integrating culture into planning across municipal departments – adopting a "cultural lens" on local decision making. As in any area of local planning, this requires that cultural information be spatially mapped and understood. One use of GIS mapped cultural information is to help municipalities identify concentrations and gaps in cultural services and amenities in the community.

Integration with GIS makes it possible to connect cultural information and planning issues to other planning issues and priorities. For example:

- ▶ land use planning – including zoning, areas designated for intensification and/or regeneration, employment lands, transportation nodes and corridors, neighbourhood planning, etc.;
- ▶ economic development – including industry clusters, distribution of employment, proximity of assets to restaurants and hospitality amenities, etc.;
- ▶ social planning – including relating cultural resource distribution to population profiles (eg. levels of education, income, country of origin, etc.), to concentrations of poverty, to crime patterns, etc.

A Mapping Toolkit

In Ontario, the Municipal Cultural Planning Partnership (MCPPE) is a coalition of seven provincial government ministries,⁴ the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, individual municipalities, cultural groups, and the University of Waterloo dedicated to promoting municipal cultural planning across the province.

A priority for MCPPE over the past year has been examining the potential for a provincial cultural mapping system that would achieve two objectives: to establish cross-government consensus on a definition of cultural resources; and

to create a tool to support more municipalities in undertaking cultural mapping. The system is built on categories of cultural resources in the CRF outlined above, tied to local mapping tools built on three principles:

- ▶ place-based and locally administered – the mapping system is managed and maintained locally based on firsthand knowledge of culture in that community;
- ▶ continuous updating – the database is built organically over time through contributions from different stakeholders (a "wiki-based" approach); and
- ▶ local capacity and sustainability – the system must be able to be managed locally through predictable and known levels of human and financial resources.⁵

The tool enables data from multiple databases to be merged to build the most comprehensive and accurate "superset of databases." Each organization or entity in the system has more than 100 possible fields of information. Data is GIS-coded and searchable by keywords. The system has a range of features enabling cultural information to be analyzed and reports produced on a range of issues such as: number of assets per area and assets per industry (NAICS) group; organizations by NAICS and employee size; and sales reports.

Mobilizing Local Knowledge

The strength of Statistics Canada data is that it gives municipalities across the country accurate snapshots of growth and change in creative cultural industries, and provides comparisons with other municipalities. The disadvantage is that national, often census-based data is only updated every several years. It therefore cannot deliver the accurate, timely, and "real time" information needed to inform planning and economic development in rapidly changing economic and social environments.

The strength of a locally-managed, wiki-based model is that it enables local communities to continuously update and expand information on local cultural assets. However, to succeed, wiki-based systems rely on people and organizations to participate actively in contributing information. This means that mapping systems must be connected to systematic engagement strategies that keep cultural issues visible and encourage participation in mapping across the community.

Strengthening Connectivity

We know that one of the biggest challenges facing the development of the creative cultural sector is lack of connectivity. Many people working in the creative sector work independently, and often from home, making them somewhat invisible – to one another and to the larger community. Creative work thrives when people "bump

2 <www.mappingauthenticity.com>

3 <www.statecan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/81-595-m2004021-eng.pdf>

4 Culture; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Economic Development; Tourism; Citizenship; Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs; Northern Development and Mines.

5 The system was developed by AuthenticCity in collaboration with the Breken Group.

into” one another generating new ideas, products, and services.

Most creative businesses are small- and medium-sized enterprises requiring collaboration and shared investment. Creative economy work often results in short-term project teams assembling and disassembling – not unlike the Hollywood model, where skilled workers collaborate on a movie and then disband, repeating this cycle over and over again. Business networking is required to form these new relationships of collapsible alliances.

The mapping system described above has a series of tools to support local engagement and participation. Enhancements to these tools are being developed that leverage the power of social networking sites and platforms such as Facebook and YouTube to feed the cultural mapping system. Google applications support the local cultural sector feed of photos and videos to Google Maps.

The goal is to drive more people to the system, to support a range of cultural goals (such as the development of local creative industries and cultural tourism), to expand the volunteer base for cultural organizations, to engage the community in conserving local heritage, etc.

Another “next generation” mapping tool is a creative occupations database for local economic developers that is being pioneered by Prince Edward County in partnership with Durham Region. The goal is to map human skill sets and talent on an individual-by-individual basis via a digital and automated process. This powerful database enables economic developers to identify the number of creative workers, talent strengths, and gaps. Identification of the creative worker talent pool allows communities to target new investment attraction initiatives matched to the labour force. For example, if it became apparent that a community had strength in video gaming software development and related talent, it could pursue a video gaming investment attraction strategy. Likewise, gaps can be analyzed and addressed.

The mapping toolkit kicks into high gear when a community starts to “network the network” via an existing and powerful platform such as Facebook. The social networking platform allows for the talent pool to self-identify and to connect for community collaboration (like the Hollywood model cited earlier), as well as for talent pool database building. The Facebook site can be used as a real time database updating mechanism – linked to the broader creative occupations database, and assisting with the age-old challenge of how to keep databases up to date

Tools such as these reinforce that cultural mapping is not a standalone system. Rather, it is one that depends on parallel strategies to broaden community engagement and mobilize resources across sectors through new partnerships and shared government systems. [MW](#)

Toronto Creative City Planning Framework

In 2008, the Toronto Creative City Planning Framework recommended Toronto adopt “a cultural planning approach to place-based creative sector development,” and identified cultural mapping as an essential tool for implementing cultural planning.

Since that time, Toronto has taken several steps to implement cultural mapping and cultural planning. One such step is council’s direction to the planning and culture departments to develop recommendations for including cultural potential as an element of the planning process, and to propose a set of criteria to be included as part of the future planning.

There is an identified need for a stronger shared vocabulary connecting planning for place, culture, and economy. The following guiding principles are proposed:

- ▶ whole systems thinking;
- ▶ defining shared needs to take action;
- ▶ a common language;
- ▶ thinking outside silos;
- ▶ democratizing culture;
- ▶ creating opportunities for culture; and
- ▶ understanding spatial significance.

Cultural mapping was identified in recommendations as essential to successful integration of culture in the planning system.

The city has also partnered with the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto to establish Placing Creativity. The group brings together individuals from academic, government, and community organizations to push thinking and practice in cultural mapping. In June 2009, the group organized the first Placing Creativity Conference, bringing together leading international cultural mapping experts from a wide range of disciplines and areas of professional practice.*

The Creative City Planning Framework does not consider mapping a standalone system but one of three strategies needed for Toronto to realize its potential as a creative city:

- ▶ mapping to identify assets;
- ▶ engagement to broaden participation; and
- ▶ partnerships to mobilize resources.

**Reflections on the conference are described in the article on page 27 of this issue by Toronto Cultural Affairs Officer and Placing Creativity co-chair Elena Bird.*