

## **Culture in Sustainable Communities: Integrating Culture in Community Sustainability Policy and Planning in Canada and Europe**

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Press. In 2011, she co-edited with Nancy Duxbury a special issue of the journal *Culture and Local Governance* on the subject of culture and sustainable communities.

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**Abstract:** This research builds on a critical examination of Canada's 'four-pillar' model of community sustainability (comprising environment responsibility, economic health, social equity, and cultural vitality), which attempts to integrate cultural considerations into overall local planning for sustainability through the development of Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs). While this Canadian policy has been groundbreaking, further examinations of overarching policy contexts and comparison with other approaches to integrating culture into community planning were needed. Thus, this project extended prior analyses to compare Canadian practices with European approaches to integrating culture into community and city planning. The project mainly involved document analysis and interviews. It aimed to develop greater understanding of current planning practices and policies from Canada and Europe that enable 'culturally sensitive' sustainable community development. This paper outlines the results of preliminary analyses of findings, observations, and concerns arising from this project.

**Keywords:** sustainability, cultural planning, urban planning, community development, governance, Canada

7938 words

## **Introduction**

Despite the growing movement to think about sustainability in a more comprehensive and holistic manner (Bostöm 2012) and the emergence of a four pillar approach or model of sustainability internationally (Duxbury & Jeannotte 2012b), the inclusion of culture in sustainability plans, policies and programs continues to be fraught with conceptual and operational issues and challenges. Nonetheless, a variety of promising initiatives that incorporate cultural considerations in planning processes and sustainability discussions can be identified.

At a global level, United Cities and Local Governments is advocating for culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development in the Rio+20 negotiations and final document, which would provide an international platform to advance the recognition and inclusion of culture in sustainable development policies and practices (UCLG 2012). At the local level, a multitude of regional and local initiatives

promise to shed light on both the difficulties and possible pathways for including cultural considerations in community sustainability plans and actions. These efforts reflect a paradigm-shift-in-process, progressively advancing through a wide range of varied and experimental initiatives rooted in a pervasive and heightened concern for grassroots public participation (Duxbury, Cullen & Pascual 2012).

Building on a critical examination of Canadian approaches to the adoption of the ‘four pillar’ model of community sustainability (comprising environment responsibility, economic health, social equity, and cultural vitality) in Canada’s Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (Duxbury & Jeannotte 2010, 2012a, forthcoming), the project examined the multiple policy contexts and on-the-ground planning realities that influence local sustainability planning and actions, challenging or enabling the inclusion of cultural considerations within these initiatives. Secondly, it aimed to put these practices in a comparative perspective, beginning with an examination of the prevailing messages regarding culture that are embedded in European sustainable development approaches, guides, and related resources. Ultimately, the study aimed to contribute to improving the inclusion of cultural considerations within integrated community-level sustainability planning and policy.

### **Methods**

The one-year project (2011-2012) enabled the research team to conduct 18 interviews in Ottawa and Vancouver, including representatives from national, provincial and local governments as well as organizations working with them to advance sustainability planning in communities (see Appendix A). This was complemented by a literature review of academic and non-academic resources related to topics of sustainability, cities, and culture; participant observation in culture and sustainability planning processes; small surveys of planners in Canada; other correspondence in Canada and Europe; and presentations in Canada and Europe that solicited feedback and discussion. This paper focuses on the preliminary research findings from the Canadian interviews and the literature review, and compares this material to European observations.

### **Canada**

Canada is a constitutional monarchy and a federal state with a democratic parliament. It comprises ten provinces and three territories. Jurisdictional relationships are complex: provinces have responsibility for municipalities, which are considered ‘creatures of the provinces’ under the Canadian Constitution, but the federal (national) government has the power to intervene in ‘urban’ issues such as public transportation, housing and infrastructure (Gattinger 2008). Politically, there is growing recognition of the need to respond to global, environmental and demographic challenges through actions that are “local and shaped by a strong sense of place” (EACCC 2006, p. 10). However, without formal institutions to foster collaboration and coordination in these areas, increasing reliance must be placed on non-structural factors such as cultures of collaboration, local leadership and partnerships (Gattinger 2008).

### **Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs)**

In 2005, the federal government introduced Gas Tax Agreements with the provinces to share a portion of gasoline revenues, which were to be transferred to municipalities using a per capita formula. The 2005 federal budget provided \$5 billion in gas tax funds over five years, allocated on a per-capita basis to the provinces with targeted amounts for PEI and the three territories. The funding was to be spent on

environmentally sustainable municipal infrastructure to achieve three outcomes: reduced greenhouse gas emissions, cleaner air, and cleaner water. Eligible projects fell under six categories: water and wastewater systems, solid waste management, public transit, roads and bridges, community energy systems, and community capacity building to help communities to plan for sustainability. Monetary transfers were conditional upon local preparation of ICSPs.

As defined in the Gas Tax Agreements, an ICSP is “a long-term plan, developed in consultation with community members, for the community to realize sustainability objectives it has for the environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions of its identity” (Canada-Alberta 2005, no page; see also Infrastructure Canada 2005-2006). The rationale for the ICSP initiative was to accelerate a shift in local planning and decision making toward a more long-term, coherent and participatory approach to achieving sustainable communities and to help communities plan and manage resources, achieve identifiable outcomes, deliver services and address priorities within an integrated four-pillar framework. In 2006, the federal government’s External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities reinforced this approach to sustainable development for cities and communities by endorsing the four-pillar model of sustainability encompassing cultural vitality, environmental responsibility, economic health, and social equity (EACCC 2006).

Between 2006 and 2011, over a hundred ICSPs or similar reports were produced, with smaller communities being most responsive. Nonetheless, the role of culture continues to present conceptual difficulties and, operationally, an integrated approach to implementing plans is still a challenge.

### **Challenges in integrating the cultural pillar within the ICSPs**

Integrated planning and the cultural pillar of sustainability were generally new to both provinces and municipalities. Several provinces and organizations developed guides to help municipalities prepare ICSPs. As of 2009, 17 guides had been developed by provincial municipal associations, municipal affairs ministries of provinces, and other organizations working in the area of sustainability planning (Duxbury & Jeannotte 2012b).

A review of the inclusion of culture in these guides revealed that only about half defined *culture* and fewer than half mentioned key aspects or local contexts of culture (see Table 1). While most had a rationale for including culture in the ICSP (usually based on the four-pillar model), most failed to discuss the need to incorporate culture into vision statements or sustainability principles. From an implementation perspective, most guides included mechanisms for integrating culture, such as involvement of cultural representatives in the public engagement processes or the development of cultural checklists or inventories. However, most did not discuss culture in the implementation or evaluation stages of the sustainability planning cycle.

**Table 1. Overview of inclusion of culture in ICSP guides (n=17)**

<i>Conceptual aspects:</i>	
Definitions of culture	9
Key aspects/notable contexts of culture	6
Rationale for inclusion of culture	15
<i>Operational aspects:</i>	
Guidance on integration of culture	16
Key mechanisms for integrating culture	13

Source: Duxbury & Jeannotte 2012

In a subsequent review of a selection of individual ICSPs across the country, conceptually, culture was most often linked to: (a) community identity, distinctiveness, attractiveness and ‘sense of place’; and/or (b) sociability, public participation, voluntarism and social networks. The consideration and integration of cultural aspects within a local sustainability planning context was new for all communities, and in some cases also represented the first attempts at any planning for culture. The general lack of direction on culture from the guides meant that the local cultural integration attempts reflect diverse bottom-up/grassroots processes and thinking about how culture should be fostered and sustained within particular communities (see examples in Table 2). However, an array of policy and implementation issues were observed when moving from high-level statements to concrete action plans:

- Linkages with existing municipal cultural plans were sometimes missing, or if a cultural section was included in the action plan, it was often ‘siloeed’ with few linkages to other sections;
- Culture-related items in economic and social sustainability contexts were often ‘minor’ suggestions;
- Culture tended to be marginalized in sustainability action plans, which did not prioritize cultural items;
- Culture-specific actions often seemed rudimentary (e.g., developing lists of heritage properties, or of cultural organizations in the community);
- Concrete actions on the cultural components were often delayed; and
- Culture-related ideas, visions and plans were undermined by limited municipal resources.

**Table 2. Examples of ICSP approaches**

	<b>City of Kingston</b>	<b>City of Williams Lake</b>
Population (2006)	117,207	10,744
ICSP title and year	<i>Sustainable Kingston</i> (2010)	<i>Imagine Our Future</i> (2010)
General description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision of Kingston – “Canada’s most sustainable city”</li> <li>• ICSP included guiding principles, themes, indicators and goals to help achieve vision</li> <li>• Organized under four separate pillars but recognized the need for integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICSP used as basis of Official Community Plan <i>Creating Our Future!</i> (2011)</li> <li>• Identified 25-year objectives, key performance indicators, and five-year transition strategies for each priority area</li> <li>• Official Community Plan translated ICSP into specific goals and objectives over 5-10 years</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural pillar includes four themes: arts, creativity and entertainment; history and heritage; active citizenship; and diversity</li> <li>• Cultural tourism is included separately under economic pillar</li> </ul>	<p>Identified 10 strategic priority areas including three relevant to cultural pillar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive arts and culture</li> <li>• Partnering with First Nations</li> <li>• Lively downtown</li> </ul>
Participation/Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive public consultation including a community sustainability charette, several “community conversations” and public open houses, and a sustainability summit</li> <li>• Established community partnerships to help implement ICSP with an ongoing inventory of actions featured on <i>Sustainable Kingston</i> website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held over 50 events to elicit public participation, with about 1,200 people (over 10% of the population) providing input</li> <li>• Attempts to integrate arts community and First Nations as full partners in sustainability plans hampered by resource limitations and unsettled treaty negotiations</li> </ul>

Sources: Sustainable Kingston 2010; Williams Lake 2010, 2011

## **Changing contexts for ICSPs**

A change in government in 2006, soon after the federal-provincial Gas Tax agreements were signed, resulted in the Gas Tax Transfers being made permanent in 2008. Although the federal-provincial agreements remained in force, this weakened the federal incentive for local governments to develop these plans within the five-year window. Also in 2008, the financial crisis resulted in federal withdrawal from active encouragement and funding of ICSPs. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) provided support for ICSP development under its Green Municipal Fund until 2011. The FCM now only supports sustainable neighbourhood action plans<sup>1</sup>, community brownfield action plans, and greenhouse gas reduction plans.

Nonetheless, ICSPs seem to have taken on a life of their own beyond the original Gas Tax transfers (interview [N3]<sup>2</sup>), with communities continuing to develop community sustainability plans and to integrate culture into these and other planning initiatives. However, we believe the 'ICSP period' (2005-2012) has essentially ended. Consequently, during the course of the research our gaze became more focused on what has changed because of this initiative, what will remain, and the impacts of this period on future local sustainability planning and related actions.

## **In addition to and around plans**

### **Insights from literature**

In the literature we analyzed, the dominance of the actual planning process is clear; much of the Canadian literature focused on the ICSPs but Local Agenda 21 plans were also mentioned. The literature included guides and practical tools for effective planning but also reflective pieces looking at different ways of examining the steps to completing a plan. But we also observed three other processes that complement planning and that were seen as effective ways of integrating the cultural pillar into broader planning processes:

- Developing a common vision and a common understanding before the planning process;
- Governance practices – to enhance the planning process; and
- Public participation – to drive acceptance and adoption of the plan.

### *Common vision*

Several of the texts argued for the need for a common community vision and a common understanding of culture and the way it would be integrated into the planning process before starting planning. Broad-ranging community dialogue around common visions relevant to the particular characteristics of the

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<sup>1</sup> A sustainable neighbourhood action plan builds upon an existing municipal sustainable community plan or strategy, such as an integrated community sustainability plan, Local Agenda 21 plan, or official municipal plan. To be eligible for GMF funding, a sustainable neighbourhood action plan must include: (a) a vision, and environmental, social and economic goals and targets; and (b) actions to achieve the goals and targets in all areas of municipal activity, including energy, waste and water management, sustainable transportation, land use, and brownfield remediation (FCM 2012). Notably, there are no references to cultural dimensions of sustainability.

<sup>2</sup> Details of interviews are listed in Appendix A.

community can help to set the general directions for the plan in ways that will facilitate the integration of culture.

For the most part the literature that dealt specifically with the building of a common vision linked this question to the leadership role that needed to be played in order to develop the common vision. Interesting debates were outlined with different perspectives about which type of leader was the most successful: elected officials, a private sector business leader, a community leader, someone from the cultural sector. The consensus appeared to be that the specific nature of individual communities would be a crucial factor in understanding what might be the most promising form of leadership.

#### *Governance practices*

The second process that was highlighted in the texts was that of governance, of building multiple forms of partnership to enhance the likelihood that the plan will be able to build a coalition that can bring forward a common vision around the inclusion of culture. First of all, there were multiple examples of trying to build partnerships across departments at the local level. This is one of the areas in which the literature review and the interviews correspond closely; both underlining the ways in which planning departments had built horizontal partnerships within the local government. The next set of governance arrangements was once again horizontal but this time between the organizations of civil society and the local government. Some of these were with organizations in the cultural sector, others more broadly with the health and social sectors. The third area of governance arrangements was the vertical intergovernmental partnerships built across multilevel political structures. The texts looked at successful practices and challenges of establishing, maintaining and enhancing governance partnerships.

#### *Public participation*

Our final category of processes seen to enhance the planning process is that of public participation. The texts tended to be of two types. The more theoretical texts saw public participation as a bottom-up citizen commitment to a holistic vision of society which could drive public understanding and municipal adoption of the plan. The second type of document dealt with concrete examples of public participation and many of these took the form of tools for planners to enable them to organize and structure public participation. These tended to be more top-down than bottom-up, illustrating the complexities and ambiguities of public participation. The greater number of top-down illustrations is also, we feel, an indication of the limited amount of research being done on practice.

#### **Insights from interviews**

The project included 18 interviews with representatives from local, provincial, and federal governments. Analysis of the interview transcripts is ongoing. This section reports insights on two aspects: (1) overarching policy contexts that may influence local efforts to integrate culture into sustainability planning and action, and (2) local planning realities and challenges in integrating culture into broader planning. These dimensions reveal the contextual and on-the-ground influences that enable or constrain the inclusion of culture within broader community sustainability planning, as well as the disconnections among different government levels which may complicate efforts to place culture within sustainable community development.

*Overarching policy contexts: National policy*

Among the federal government interviews, three tendencies characterized the operating atmosphere influencing departments' ability to engage with sustainability as a framework for culture:

1. The Federal Sustainable Development Act, which gives rise to departmental Sustainable Development Strategies, focuses on 'greening' internal operations, reinforcing the 'sustainable development = environment only' mindset within government thinking, policy, and programs (interview [F3]).<sup>3</sup>
2. Economic development is the guiding motivation at the moment. In the context of financial crisis, the Economic Action Plan (with broader influences) funds projects based on economic development and creation of jobs, not sustainability. For example, there is a tendency to link cultural support measures solely to the economic agenda. Consequently, cultural funding requests are couched mainly in economic terms, with ICSPs or the holistic language of community sustainability rarely referenced, and thus having little role in federal cultural funding decisions (interview [F4]).
3. There is pressure to show short-term results (while sustainability outcomes are long-term and hard to measure) and "to tell a better outputs story" with emphasis on short-term measurable impacts (interview [F3]). This translates into programs that prioritize pilot projects over building continuity into cultural initiatives, that do not allow enough time for projects to show meaningful medium- and longer-term results, and that tend to discourage innovative funding partnerships (interview [M7]).

All three tendencies work against holistic, multidimensional considerations of sustainability and long-term planning and decision-making. Nonetheless, we found a few promising initiatives underway at the federal level.

*Sustainable development of Aboriginal communities.* The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (DAAND) recently began working on a Community Sustainability Framework that includes culture. This inclusion reflects three underlying dimensions: (1) the inherent cultural diversity among Aboriginal communities and groups, and the desire to maintain separate and distinct identities; (2) streamlining and potentially integrating the current requirement for local communities to develop separate reports for 70 different policy centres within DAAND; and (3) the need for DAAND to learn from communities where culture is at the heart of their sustainability plans and where understanding and restoring their culture is allowing them to move away from dependency and beyond the trauma inflicted by the residential school era<sup>4</sup> (interviews [F1] and [N4]). In developing the Community Sustainability Framework, discussions with communities across the country reconfirmed that cultural considerations, such as language, the role of elders, traditional knowledge, and family structures, are interconnected (i.e.,

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<sup>3</sup> This narrow focus corresponds with the popular perception that sustainable development equals only environmental protection, which was seen as the biggest barrier to implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture in Quebec (interview [P1]).

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the residential school era in Canada, see the websites of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (<http://www.trc.ca>) and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (<http://www.ahf.ca>).

they are not viewed as ‘separate’ in the European sense) (interview [F1]). This provides a distinct and intrinsically interconnected basis for thinking about and acting towards holistic community sustainability.

*Culture.* In recent years, the Department of Canadian Heritage has also tried to put more emphasis on communities – promoting access to the arts at the community level and becoming more informed about how Canadians consume culture (interview [F4]). The Canada Council for the Arts is similarly putting emphasis on access to the arts in communities and on better understanding the “arts ecology” of various disciplines and the broader array of systems and supports necessary for cultural vitality (interview [F2]). This broadened perspective appears to signal an appreciation for more holistic approaches, which are viewed as a leading practice, if not always reflected in policy and practice. Bilateral explorations between arts and other sectors, such as arts and health, education, and environmental agendas (interview [F4]) may be a first step towards more integrated understanding of the role of the arts in other sectors of society, but are less holistic than the ideal that integrated planning approaches promise.

The federal government has recently placed increasing emphasis on history and heritage, celebrating a number of anniversaries of historic events in the 1800s (interviews [F3] and [F4]). Conceptual and practical links between nature and heritage/cultural resources (described in next section) indicate this may be a way to connect cultural with environmental concerns, but only if the celebrations and related initiatives reinforce and support these links.

*Infrastructure.* Cultural infrastructure is eligible for funding through Infrastructure Canada’s funding programs. This department is also responsible for the Gas Tax Fund agreements with the provinces that require that Canadian municipalities to develop ICSPs. Since provinces and territories have exclusive jurisdiction over municipal affairs, the development of municipal ICSPs is a commitment made by the provinces/territories when they signed GTF agreements. The provinces/territories must report to the Government of Canada on the progress made in developing these ICSPs (interview [F5]). Due to a delay in receiving this input, we are still in the process of following up with Infrastructure Canada regarding the status and content of progress reports received.

Environment Canada did not respond to our repeated interview requests.

*Overarching policy contexts: Provincial policy – Province of Quebec*

The Quebec Ministry for Culture, Communications and Women’s Issues (MCCCF) has spearheaded a provincial policy initiative to put “culture at the heart of our sustainable development.” The Agenda 21 for Culture was adopted by Quebec as a blueprint because it recognizes cultural diversity and is concerned that culture becomes part of environmental, economic, and social development (interview [N1]). The initiative is a means of ensuring that culture is better integrated into all Quebec policies in a way that promotes the sustainability of Quebec society (interview [P1]). *Loi sur le développement durable*, MCCCF’s initial action plan, was approved in 2006, covering the period 2006-2013, and comprises 15 actions including the development of a new framework for municipal cultural plans that incorporates sustainable development. In December 2011, *Agenda 21 de la culture du Québec* was released with seven of its 21 objectives relating to local and regional planning and development. Going forward, the ministry will continue to sign partnership agreements with municipal and regional

governments to help fund (50/50) the development of cultural policies, but it is not yet clear how Agenda 21 for Culture will affect these agreements.

The two main barriers to implementation have been the popular perception that sustainable development is solely environmental protection, and the common relegation of culture to the social pillar (interview [P1]). On the ground, three different types of resistance to inclusion of culture within sustainability planning have been observed: (a) resistance among planners, that limited financing will lead to shattered expectations; (b) resistance among developers, that another set of rules will be imposed upon them; and (c) resistance within the arts community, that the broad definition of culture will result in no new resources for the arts (interview [N2]).

Ontario's championing of municipal cultural planning and British Columbia's encouragement of local cultural planning (through the Olympics-related legacy-building organization Arts Now) are also of note, but were not part of this study. Overall, the main emphasis of these other provincial initiatives is the development of cultural plans, with secondary attention to integrating culture with other sectors.

#### *Local planning realities*

While acknowledging a wide diversity of situations within communities of all sizes, the size and growth profile of communities influenced the nature of planning initiatives, discussions about community sustainability, and how cultural considerations were taken up in these broader planning contexts.

*Small, rural communities.* Small, rural communities facing declining populations and the challenge of "devitalization" (interview [N1]), tend to view revitalization as tied to employment and to a re-assertion of pride in identity. Although sustainability planning tends to be largely about maintaining population and the local economy (interview [N4]), discussions about culture and sustainability centre on the continuation of their way of life, with culture broadly defined. Two key avenues through which culture-nature interconnections can begin within local integrated sustainability planning efforts are heritage and local food production. Heritage protection is key in community or regional attempts to assert its identity. For example, in tourism marketing of an area, cultural and ecological attractions are considered together and in some cases are inextricably linked, such as old mills located near waterfalls or on rivers that are objects of environmental protection. In popular perception, heritage and nature are bound together. Furthermore, issues of food security and urban agriculture are forming the cultural basis for public reclamation of unused spaces and 'guerrilla gardening', initiatives that are often tied into farmers' markets, the '100 Mile Diet', and the activities of artists and artisans who showcase their products alongside the products of local agriculture (interview [N4]), a trend evident in both small communities and larger cities.

In terms of planning, small communities face a challenge to include small volunteer-staffed non-profit cultural organizations in planning processes and, if they are consulted, to ensure that this is done in an effective manner (interview [N4]). As well, now that many small communities have completed an ICSP, they are asking "Now what?," and this is revealing uncertainty about the 'next steps'. Longer-term commitments to continued resourcing will be required because many of these plans have time horizons that stretch far into the future, but it is unclear whether any support will be available (interview [N4]).

*Cities*. Key conceptual challenges to integrating culture into sustainability discussions and planning are: limited understanding of culture's role in liveable communities or in sustainability; difficulties in distinguishing between *cultural sustainability* and *culture's role in sustainability*; and limited understanding about how sustainability planning might relate and contribute to cultural life and a sense of place (interviews [M5], [M6], [M4], and [N4]). Although a multiplicity of locally resonant approaches to conceptualizing culture within sustainability exist, some leading municipal practices focus on identities and cultural diversity, including considerations of values, inclusivity, and representation. Nonetheless, the variety of ways of conceptualizing culture, as well as its fluid and dynamic characteristics, continue to challenge more traditional planning practices.

We found that working across organizational lines in the city is common for cultural staff, but integration in planning is difficult. While there is growing *recognition* of the need for integrated city planning, action is not always forthcoming as it is easier to fall back into planning silos (many interviews). Further, sustainability offices usually focus solely on environmental conditions and may dismiss more holistic views on sustainability. Cross-departmental collaboration requires ongoing efforts, with cultural planners proactively making connections, 'inviting themselves' to internal multi-departmental meetings and projects, and continually scanning for opportunities internally and externally. We found that while impressive plans may be developed, their actual implementation is highly subject to political change and available resources.

Nonetheless, a number of promising practices emerged from the interviews. Within plans, cultural elements can be included in visions of sustainability in 'tangible' forms such as public art, revitalization of historic centres, and celebrating a community's multicultural heritage (interview [M6]). Operational practices such as co-location of arts and parks programming staff provide numerous opportunities to explore synergies (interview [M7]). Local governments facilitate discussions among multiple stakeholders and informed public participation, organize ongoing public discussion events and opportunities, and develop partnerships. However, interviewees felt that public participation was not always encouraged at all stages in a process, and that the capacity for a cultural community to be meaningfully involved in planning processes at a neighbourhood level may not exist if few artists live in the neighbourhood.

Interviewees also discussed good practices in integrating culture within sustainability plans and programs. Some cities are developing spaces and opportunities for sharing traditions cross-culturally. Others are recognizing community pioneers. Environmental arts practices are also a fruitful way of making the linkages tangible, enabled by artist residencies in parks and heritage restorations; initiatives to creatively repurpose green waste; and integrating public art into gardens, nature pathways, and trails. Festivals related to local environment and history also encourage culture-sustainability linkages. Although there is limited funding, some cities are making space for innovative non-commercial practices that may drive change towards a more sustainable future.

### **Comparisons with Europe**

The primary focus of the study, in line with the purpose of the research funding, was on investigating and synthesizing Canadian approaches and case studies. These findings were then used to inform a

comparative analysis with European situations. We began with an examination of the prevailing messages regarding culture that are embedded in European sustainable development approaches, guides, and related resources.<sup>5</sup> This section highlights some preliminary comparisons.

### *European cities as cultural projects*

In literature on sustainable development and cities, European cities are identified as cultural projects in themselves, tightly linked to national and regional identities and historic city roles and traditions. Culture is there, implicitly, and typically embedded in discourses on heritage.<sup>6</sup> However, branding imperatives and inter-city competitiveness also propel contemporary ‘creative city’ developments and consequent changes in ways of life. Flagship projects based on enhancing or aggregating several dispersed museum collections have helped several cities to be ‘put in the map’ or to change their ranking in the ‘European Cultural Map/List’. The creation of annual events like the Long Night of Museums (in 1997) or the ICOMOS Day of Monuments have helped anchor citizens to each city network of museums and to their own historic centres. However, sometimes cultural considerations are not ‘grounded’, and do not have a connection with the social and economic daily-life issues of residents. Documents regarding urban renewal and the development of ‘new’ neighbourhoods/districts, as well as European Union guidelines for urban development reflect these sometimes conflicting dynamics. In reality, practices can be very different from idealistic visions reflected in these documents. The challenges inherent in translating visions and policies to practices are visible even in some World Heritage-listed historic centres. In comparison, while heritage also holds importance in sustainability planning in Canadian cities, cities in themselves are not typically viewed as ‘cultural projects’ and the level of support for heritage projects is not as developed.

### *Sustainability*

Europe seems to be ahead of Canada on environmental (green) practices in society, reflective of the political and monetary support allocated by the EU to environmental infrastructures and systems. Significant EU investment programs for urban interventions aimed at environmental improvement and green sustainability have ‘eclipsed’ cultural considerations and heritage preservation due to the considerable imbalance between the budget allocated to those programs and the national/local budget allocated for culture (in countries such as Portugal). Integrated sustainability discussions in Europe seem to occur within the rubric of *sense of place* and identity rather than within discourses on *holistic sustainability*. Canadian emphasis on community ‘livability’ also sometimes supplants references to sustainability (interview [M8]). In both Canada and Europe, holistic considerations of sustainability are often more pronounced in smaller communities (e.g., in moments of ‘crisis’).

### *Cultural criteria*

Are cultural criteria included in decisions on urban renewal/regeneration? In Europe, it varies. On one hand, conceptual linkages between heritage conservation, preservation, integration of cultural facilities in citizens’ daily life, and sustainability are found in the literature, suggesting a promising pathway. On the

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the literature review, case studies of some European cities and regions were initiated, and this work continues. We intend to expand the number and geographic coverage of these cases in future.

<sup>6</sup> Annual programs to sustain heritage buildings and neighbourhoods began with EU pilot projects in the 1990s and are now a common practice in many cities through the creation of neighbourhood technical support offices for conservation and rehabilitation of private housing projects.

other hand, a prevailing change of discourse from *conservation/preservation* to *rehabilitation* is creating a situation where the focus is shifting from ‘cultural value’ to ‘function’ as the main criterion of urban renewal decision-making.

Cultural indicators depend on the definition of culture used and also the type of planning. In the literature, we can find cases where the evaluation of the cultural cohesion of a community is important. In other cases, cultural criteria are used to evaluate cultural creativity and cultural facilities or the level of heritage preservation. Very often these criteria are used to measure the impact of other urban programs focused on social or environmental sustainability. In general, cultural criteria are diffusely present but very often not clearly mentioned or outlined. Dominant cultural criteria in European urban policies can only be found at the level of a protected and well-defined heritage site or neighbourhood. In Canada, sustainability planning processes tend to lack cultural indicators, which makes reporting and follow-up difficult. Nonetheless, some communities are developing multidimensional checklists (including cultural elements) to guide development, which may be a base for future indicator development.

A further complicating factor is that culture is typically very much associated with cultural infrastructure or facilities such as museums and cultural events. In Europe, there tends to be a divide between the somewhat autonomous worlds of technical/urban planning and architecture and culture/art history/cultural management with limited integration in practices of planning and operational management. In Canada, infrastructure also forms a key element of public discussions about culture, although in some places there is a backing away from the ‘bigger (or more) is better’ mentality.

#### *Participation/inputs*

In both Europe and Canada, planners are placing greater attention on increasing the amount and substance of public participation; on balancing or synthesizing complementary knowledge inputs from well-informed ‘experts’/professionals and from ‘people who live in a place every day’; and on informing residents/public beforehand so they can knowledgeably participate in public decision-making and planning processes. Ongoing challenges are evident in integrating public participation and expert-made policies in both areas.

The meaningful inclusion of cultural considerations in this process partly depends on who is involved in policy-making processes. The involvement of ‘cultural sector’ actors is needed, but not sufficient (Hájek et al. 2011). In including culture as part of participatory sustainability planning, the community as a whole must be involved in thinking about culture, and the ‘cultural actors’ must think about the broader community. However, cultural actors are also viewed as ‘cultural experts’ and thus encouraged to focus primarily or solely on cultural matters (Jeannotte & Duxbury. forthcoming).

#### *Policy to action*

In Europe, policy pronouncements on cultural heritage tend to be strongly articulated, but can often be undermined by a lack of enforcement of legal or regulatory powers. The redevelopment of historic districts can be influenced by the application of regulations that favour function over historic integrity, coupled with the ‘non-action’ of the heritage regulation-enforcing agencies. In Canada, one of the main barriers in translating policy into action appears to be the tendency to put plans ‘on the shelf’ or to postpone action on cultural priorities until after ‘harder’ sustainability initiatives, such as water treatment

systems, are implemented. Regulatory conflicts, as in Europe, sometimes also skew cultural investments, especially in circumstances where communities are growing rapidly and priority is being given to development, rather than redevelopment.

### *City-regions and neighbourhoods*

While regions may be an appropriate scale for many sustainability initiatives, especially in rural areas (interview [N4]), we have observed an increasing emphasis on the neighbourhood as the site of intervention in city-regions. This may be a reaction to the complexity of many city-regions, both in Canada and Europe. Daily life is inherently imbedded in locality, which may have fostered a turn toward the local as the most meaningful venue for sustainability planning. However, neither the city-region nor the neighbourhood has a clear governance structure, forcing interventions to be made using governing instruments of a more complex or ambiguous nature to achieve sustainability goals. As one of the Canadian interviewees noted, service delivery mechanisms are not geared to the neighbourhood level, making it hard to “connect dollars with initiatives” (interview [M3]). In some European cities, government cutbacks in recent years have eliminated neighbourhood-based offices and regulatory and other services previously available.

## **Conclusions**

### **Absences and gaps**

#### *Research gaps and conceptual challenges*

A continuing gap in Canada, expressed by many of the interviewees and also evident in the literature, is the limited research evidence on the role culture plays in sustainability. Interviewees at all government levels also wished to see better communication of the research evidence that does exist to address lack of understanding and clarity on this topic. A similar ‘lack of clarity’ about the role culture plays in sustainability also exists in Europe, in part due to the embryonic and emergent character of this multidisciplinary area of research, characterized by diverse research perspectives and narrative threads. Mapping the state of the art to address this issue is the mandate of COST Action IS1007: Investigating Cultural Sustainability, though this is just a beginning point towards developing more integrated research and policy-relevant knowledge on this topic.

#### *Policy leadership*

In Canada, senior levels of government, both federal and provincial (outside of Quebec), appear to have backed away from the longer-term vision and leadership that characterized the early years of the ICSP initiative. While some federal officials are actively listening and responding to communities, from a cultural policy perspective, incentives are lacking at the federal program level to ensure that sustainability requirements are met. More broadly, the lack of federal and provincial funding for continued sustainability planning at the local level serves to discourage and limit the potential benefits of viewing community sustainability in a holistic manner.

In Europe, initiatives to incorporate culture into local sustainability planning and development are largely bottom-up, local initiatives, in many cases informed or inspired by United Cities and Local Government’s Agenda 21 for Culture. However, the European cities of the UCLG Culture Committee that have proactively taken up A21C are largely from France and southern Europe, indicating that developing a

stronger resonance with other traditions of city-planning and cultures still requires work. Cross-European leadership would most likely arise from the European Union or the Council of Europe. Since the European Union is the source of significant funding for urban and other development initiatives, attention from municipalities is greater here. However, EU policies and guidelines have not yet addressed this issue in a comprehensive way. Council of Europe statements on sustainable development highlight the ‘integrated use of cultural and natural resources’ with a focus on heritage and landscapes. However, in October 2011 the Directorate of Culture, Cultural and Natural Heritage was transferred to a newly created Directorate of Democratic Governance, Culture and Diversity, and the (potential) policy-development link between culture and nature seems to have been dispersed. Eurocities’ Culture Forum considers culture to be “central to the sustainable development of Europe’s cities” (Eurocities 2012) but at this time it is largely focused on matters of cultural policy (e.g., access, creative partnerships, and resources for culture) rather than broad cross-sector planning integration, with the topics of *culture* and *environment* considered through separate Forums. Other organizations, like the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, are mainly focused on social and employment issues (e.g., lifelong learning, training and skills development), and do not typically integrate any cultural criteria.

#### *Local capacity challenges*

At the local level in Canada, continuing capacity limitations mean that even communities with ICSPs may not be able to achieve the vision and goals set out in those plans. We are especially concerned about the lack of resources to move from including culture in policy statements and planning documents to actions on cultural goals. High expectations are often created by sustainability plans, but disillusionment can follow if these expectations are not at least partially fulfilled. Another potential problem that may arise in the shift to neighbourhood sustainability planning is that service delivery mechanisms are not usually geared to the neighbourhood level. Neighbourhoods are even more diverse than communities, and a ‘one size fits all’ approach will be even less successful in meeting expectations created by planning initiatives. Local level resource limitations and inter-departmental collaboration challenges are also found in European cities. Integrated planning seems most present during development projects or ‘new neighbourhood’ development, but not usually a part of ‘normal’ operations. More research on the place of culture in broader city planning in European cities is required.

#### **Impacts and advances**

In Canada, we have observed two areas where we believe the ICSP initiative has had an impact:

##### *Neighbourhood planning – ‘the new frontier’*

Many communities are now accessing the FCM’s Green Fund to encourage neighbourhood sustainability planning (interview [N3]). This movement ‘downward’ may simply be the result of a shift in the availability of funding, but may also reflect the necessity of working from the ‘bottom-up’ when doing sustainability planning and developing programs that impact daily living. The most successful ICSPs and Agenda 21 for Culture consultations appear to have been those that involved citizens at all stages of the planning process. Planners may find this easier and more effective at the neighbourhood level as fewer people with closer ties to their surroundings may be able to provide a more focused perspective on sustainability issues in their area. A factor which may have strengthened the neighbourhood planning level comes from the very complexity of both public participation and urban planning; implementing it seriously may be more effective in a smaller and more homogenous planning territory.

### *A new discourse of sustainability*

ICSPs have shifted the discourse on sustainability in Canada in a number of ways. For example, federal cultural organizations, such as the Canada Council and the Department of Canadian Heritage, are becoming more interested in community-level cultural development. We have also found evidence that planners are adopting a more holistic approach to sustainability and viewing themselves as ‘connectors’ among the various stakeholders.

A new vocabulary of sustainability is also beginning to be used in cultural circles. In some of the interviews we heard cultural stakeholders express concern not simply for the sustainability of their own organizations but also for the sustainability of their organizations *within* the complex ecosystems of the community – social, economic, and environmental, as well as cultural. As part of this trend, traditional notions of cultural development are being challenged. For example, one of our interviewees said that growth for growth’s sake was no longer a priority. In the past, cultural organizations tended to protect their ‘turf’ and to isolate themselves from urban development discussions. Today, many of the old business models have imploded, and culture in sustainable development is seen as a possible door to new alliances.

Much of the new discourse is based upon and advanced through public discussions. Cultural stakeholders are becoming more engaged in broad discussions of community sustainability planning and in planning in general. There has also been an increasing use of ‘citizen experts’ in sustainability planning, particularly to identify local cultural assets and to help planners and decision-makers understand what is important to the community. Some communities are attempting to plan more in partnership with affected populations, targeting development to their needs, but this approach is at an early stage. There is an emerging sense that there are economic and social advantages to investing in livability with a stronger cultural component, but much will depend upon whether the next stage of sustainability planning builds upon the momentum created by the ICSPs.

The extensive grassroots participation efforts that accompanied the development of the ICSPs, the creation of long-term visions and (at least in part) *integrated* approaches to local community planning, and the inclusion of cultural considerations within a more holistic vision of the community and its future sustainability should influence the communities’ planning approaches going forward. As one informant observed, the ICSPs have in many communities provided the incentive to look at themselves in a holistic and longer-term perspective. In the absence of the ICSPs, many of these communities might have continued to take an incremental and less effective approach to sustainability planning (interview [N3]). Also, over this period the necessity for local planning to include attention to sustainability has become a widespread norm of practice. While environmental aspects are primary, broader considerations of social, economic, and cultural sustainability are increasingly being incorporated.

### **Future research**

To advance knowledge on the Canadian and European situations as well as more overarching domains, we propose four avenues for future research:

1. The conditions of practice: How is the work is being done? What are the actual factors weighing in for people working in this area? Opportunities and constraints?

2. Conceptual foundations and references: Beyond work examining the conceptual threads of *cultural sustainability*<sup>7</sup>, further examination of the conceptual and operational development of *cultural ecology* and *cultural vibrancy* in policy/planning, two terms which seem to have growing currency in terms of planning for culture within sustainability or 'resiliency' frameworks.
3. To expand information on the Canadian situation, a grid analysis of all the ICSPs that we currently have on file (113 at May 2012). Four key areas that would help advance knowledge about planning practices are:
  - Definition of culture used in ICSP (anthropological, expressive, or both?) and inclusion in vision;
  - Involvement of cultural stakeholders at each of the stages in planning;
  - Degree of public participation and engagement; and
  - Inclusion of cultural indicators/evaluation framework.
4. To expand information on the European situation, continue investigation and analysis of a variety of city and regional initiatives that involve cultural considerations within broader sustainability planning and programs, with attention to broad geographic and national coverage and to different sizes of community.

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## Appendix A. Interviews

Interviews were held with representatives of the following organizations and government departments:

### *Federal:*

- [F1] Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada – Sustainable Communities Directorate, Sustainable Development Division, Ottawa, ON (19 October 2011)
- [F2] Canada Council for the Arts, Ottawa, ON (14 October 2011)
- [F3] Department of Canadian Heritage, Gatineau, QC (13 October 2011)
- [F4] Department of Canadian Heritage, Gatineau, QC (20 October 2011)
- [F5] Infrastructure Canada (*written responses to interview questions, received 23 May 2012*)

### *Provincial:*

- [P1] Province of Quebec, Agenda 21 for Culture, QC (12 October 2011)

### *Municipal:*

- [M1] ‘Choosing our Future’ Capital Region initiative, City of Ottawa (7 March 2012) (multiple municipalities and regional agencies were involved)
- [M2] Cultural Services, City of Ottawa, ON (18 October 2011)
- [M3] Sustainability Practice and Neighbourhood Liveability, Infrastructure Services and Community Sustainability, City of Ottawa, ON (20 October 2011)
- [M4] (City and District of) North Vancouver Arts Office, BC (17 January 2012)
- [M5] City of Richmond, BC (13 January 2012)
- [M6] City of Surrey, BC (16 January 2012)
- [M7] Arts, Culture and Environment Division, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, BC (18 January 2012)
- [M8] Cultural Services, City of Vancouver, BC (19 January 2012)

### *NGOs:*

- [N1] Conseil Régionale de la Culture de l’Outaouais, QC (12 October 2011)
- [N2] Culture Montreal, Montreal, QC (21 October 2011)
- [N3] Natural Step Canada, Ottawa, ON (2 November 2011)
- [N4] Fraser Basin Council, Vancouver, BC (18 January 2012)