

A Case Study: Research in the Small City

Interactive Research

Meetings: The Small Cities CURA held several meetings with participants of the research program in order to create a dialogue about the research process. At this particular meeting, each of the individual research projects is sharing information about their activities during the past year. Everyone in the room has an opportunity to share their experiences, breaking down barriers between academics, students and community partners. Although there are a number of meetings and events designed to develop a common frame of reference among the research partners, the 'story' of the research did not develop as comprehensively as we hoped. Without a consistent, 'topical common space' for discussion and dialogue, it was difficult to develop a 'place of listening' to support the visibility of the narrative, or group journal.



Workshops: Using the common research themes identified at a previous meeting, the Small Cities CURA held a workshop allowing participants to actively explore four different themes related to the Cultural Future of Small Cities Research Program. The model chosen to provide a structure for this exploration was the design charrette. The term charrette – French for cart – is used to describe a process in which people can participate in activities that define issues and solutions to community planning and urban design problems. Both verbal and visual representations are essential components to the process. At this workshop, four separate groups – consisting of researchers, students, community partners, and artists – were given a different theme to explore. In the morning, group leaders led a discussion about the theme and its relationship to culture in Kamloops. In the afternoon, each group used the morning discussion to construct a visual representation of their verbal discussion about the city.



This group of participants in the design charrette is exploring the concept of mapping. Supported by the visual artists in the group, they are constructing a multi-level map of Kamloops. The bottom layer represents the natural landscape. The second level represents the North and South Thompson Rivers which play a central role in the development of the city, acting as streets until supplanted by highways on land. The third level represents the city itself – the historical process of growth and change over time. The fourth layer represents the role of neighbourhoods in the city. The last layer represents the CURA research program – interpreting the underlying layers of the city. Through each layer ran a smoke stack, a reminder of the continual struggle between the preservation of landscape, the celebration of culture and history, and the progress of economy and industry (description by student research assistant Bonnie Yourk, in CURA Meetings and Workshops, 2001-2003).



Seminars: Researchers, artists, and students listen attentively to Dawn McCance, a visiting scholar from the University of Manitoba. The seminar – Theses on the Small City Archive – was a response, or critique, of the Homeless Mind Exhibit at the UCC Visual Arts Gallery.



Community Planning: The City of Kamloops used a community process, facilitated by Diane Janzen, to develop a Strategic Cultural Plan. The Small Cities CURA hosted a focus group exploring culture and education. Led by facilitator Diane Janzen, community and university participants are contributing to the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the cultural future of this small city.



Students: Students have a variety of active research roles in the Small Cities CURA: observing and recording children's active involvement at the Kamloops Museum and Archives...



...setting up a community based story mapping experience...



...reviewing consent forms with community participants...

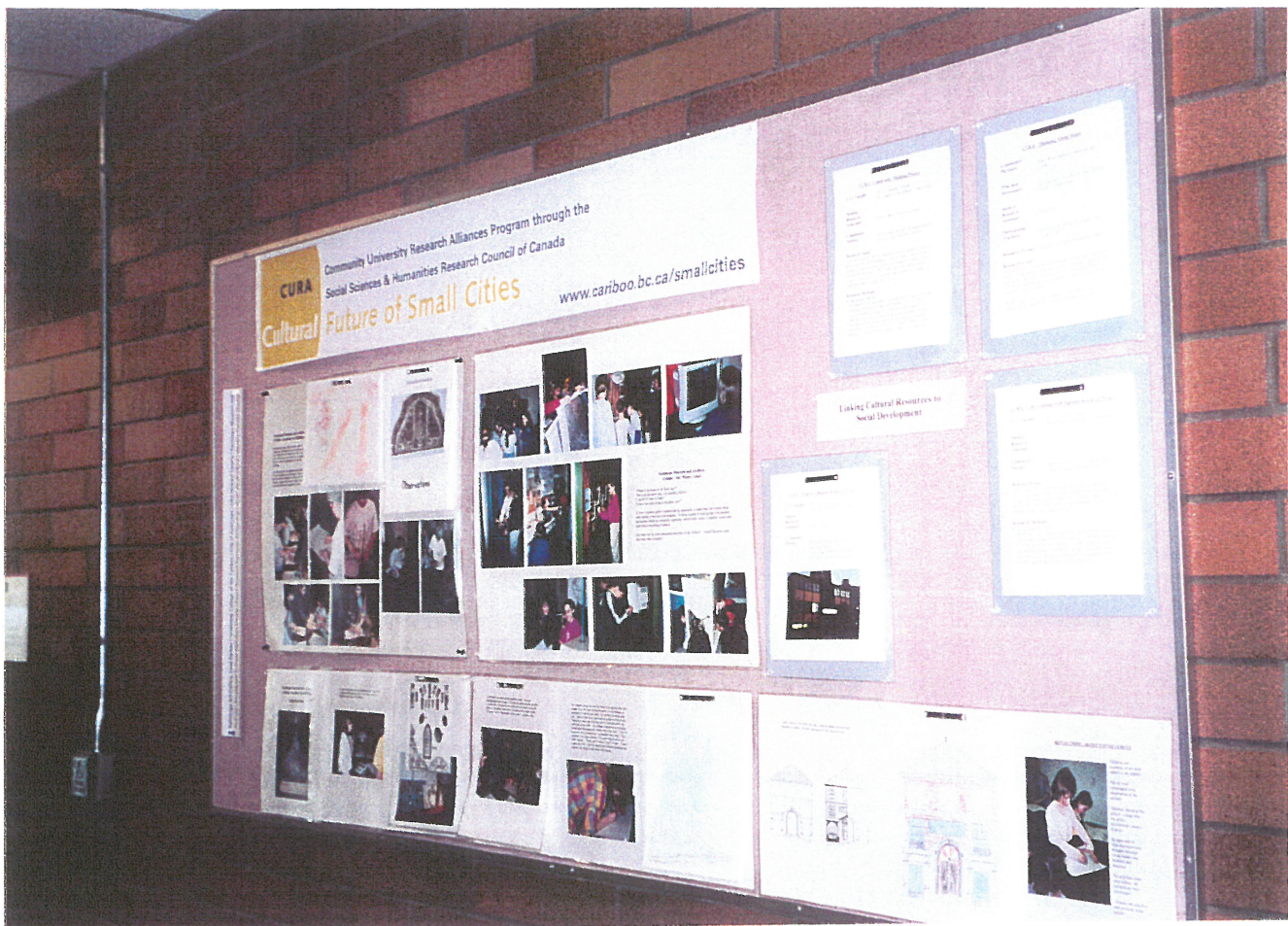


...and interviewing residents about their 'story' of the city.



Visible Research

Bulletin Boards: UCC is an academic institution making the transition from a college to a university. Consequently, it is important for research to become more visible within the walls of the institution. A bulletin board in the Arts and Education building has information about the Small Cities CURA. Each of the individual projects is described, and photographs provide evidence of the varied activities that are taking place among researchers and community partners. This initial attempt to develop a 'place of listening' for the research narrative must be expanded upon. A more permanent, consistent method to make research visible to students and other academics is required as UCC achieves university status.



Display: A display about the Small Cities CURA has a description about each of the research projects. Photos of the research activities during the first year help to further explain this community based research program. The display was featured in the lobbies of several of the community partners including the Kamloops Museum and Archives...



...and the City of Kamloops Development Services Department.



Art Exhibits: The Homeless Mind Exhibit at the UCC Visual Arts Gallery “began as a community mapping project: part traveling art exhibition and part qualitative inquiry into sense of place...” The exhibit, featuring a combination of the community based maps and stories and art by local artists, is an exploration through memory mapping – “visual or verbal representations of a landscape or locale that invoke memory as a means of understanding place and/or self” (Garrett-Petts et al, 2003, p 3).

(Note: there are a variety of photos available to visually represent the art exhibit)



Pilot Projects: Testing out new programs and ideas with community groups promotes the visibility of the research program. An example of a pilot project is the Study the City: Cemeteries educational program developed in conjunction with the Children's Museum Project. Here, a group of students and their teacher from South Sahali Elementary School are engaged in activities at the Pleasant Street Cemetery. Student researcher, Jennifer Cotter, leads the students through a variety of activities designed to support the curriculum areas of history, language arts, science, and visual arts. These activities are evaluated, and developed into an educational program for the Kamloops Museum and Archives. Also present during the pilot project: the educational programmer from the Museum, an artist and the principal researcher for the project, a reporter and a photographer from one of the local newspapers. The next day, a full page spread (with photos) describing the project appears in the Kamloops Daily News.



Media Coverage: The local media can support the visibility of the research program within the local community. In Kamloops, the cultural events reporter, Mike Youds, covered many of the events associated with the Small Cities CURA, and became quite knowledgeable about the philosophy and goals of the research program.

(Note: there are a variety of articles – many with photos – available to illustrate the media coverage)

Small cities project bigger than envisioned

The Cultural Future of Small Cities Project has grown beyond expectations and could lead to the establishment of a small cities research centre in Kamloops, UCC board was told on Friday.

Will Garrett-Petts, co-director of the multi-faceted research project, described it as a huge initiative.

"We didn't realize how big it was going to be when we first started out."

UCC and the Kamloops Art Gallery are full partners in the \$2.2-million project, which also includes a number of community partners. It currently employs 30 students as research assistants

and was recently extended from three to five years in duration.

"Which is the largest arts-based research project that Cariboo College, University College of the Cariboo and blank university have ever enjoyed."

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through its Community University Research Alliance, the project is aimed at determining how small cities can develop culturally in an age dom-

inated by major centres.

The plan is to re-apply for another five-year extension of the project in January 2006, Garrett-Petts said.

A Small Cities Forum will take place in Kamloops from May 5 to 8 as the first of two such events planned. The forum will include several public lectures at locations throughout the city.

A Small Cities Book, co-published by UCC and New Star Books, is due out this spring.

Garrett-Petts shared a few of the observations about what distinguishes Kamloops culturally from other similar-sized centres. Most cities this size do not have

cultural institutions as strong as the Kamloops Symphony, Western Canada Theatre or the Kamloops Art Gallery, he noted.

"What we've begun to discuss is that Kamloops is part of a group of small cities with national aspirations. That is, our horizons are not limited by geographical separation or small population."

The project is entering a comparison phase in which participants are sharing notes with representatives from other small Canadian cities, he said.

"At the moment we're staying away from the Kamloops/Kelowna dichotomy."



GARRETT-PETTS

Website: The website developed for the Small Cities CURA described each project, and provided links to all the community partners. As the research program unfolded, photos and descriptions of research activities were posted on the website. Given that traditional results and outcomes from research can take time, the website provides an opportunity to keep both academics and community partners aware of the research process.

(Note: this is only an example of a visual representation of the website)



Researchers involved with large, collaborative, community based research programs, must now operate within multiple social imaginaries. The traditional social imaginary expects research results to be published in peer reviewed journals. The new, modern social imaginary must be seen as a leadership opportunity – one that contributes to the development of an authentic, interactive research community with knowledge influence. The activities of the Small Cities CURA represent the initial steps for developing an interactive, authentic, and visible research ‘community of practice’. The narrative of the research activity involves both academics and community partners in a collaborative learning process. Collecting, preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting the “images, stories, and legends” (Taylor, 2004, p 23) of the research activities can be a self-reflexive, meta-cognitive process. This group process “is an important issue not only in terms of pedagogical, psychological, and epistemological research, but also and most importantly, for its cultural and political significance.” (Rinaldi in Giudici et al, 2001, p 29).

Endnotes

1. As part of the transformation process, SSHRC engaged the academic community in a consultative process involving representatives from over 80 Canadian universities. These representatives met to review the principles of the transformation, and then conducted focus groups and information sessions at their own institutions. As the campus representative for the SSHRC Transformation, each of these academics summarized their colleagues’ opinions and beliefs about new directions for social sciences and humanities research in Canada. These position papers were shared at the SSHRC Congress in June 2004, and have been compiled onto a website:

http://www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/SSHRC%20Transformation/Otherreports_files/Otherreports.htm

Works Cited:

- Calvino, Italo. (1972). *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.
- Delanty, G. (2003). *Community*. New York: Routledge.
- Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (eds.). (1998). *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach – Advanced Reflections*. 2nd Edition. Westport: Conn. Ablex Publishing.
- Fasoli, L., (2003). “Reading Photographs of Young Children: looking at practices.” *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 4.1*. pp. 32-47.
- Filippini, T., Vecchi, V. (eds.). (1996). *The Hundred Languages of Children: Catalogue of the exhibit*. Reggio Emilia: Italy. Reggio Children srl.
- Garrett- Petts, W.F., Donald Lawrence, and David McLennan. (2003). *The Homeless Mind: an Exploration through Memory Mapping*. Kamloops: B.C. Cariboo Bookworks Press.
- Giudici, C., Rinaldi, C., Krechevsky, M. (eds.). (2001). *Making Learning Visible: Children as Individual and Group Learners*. Reggio Emilia, Italy. Reggio Children srl.
- Habermas, Jurgen. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol 1*. translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press.
- MacDonald-Carlson, Helen. (1996). “The Story of the Room: Educational Principles for Young Children and Adults.” In Garrett-Petts, W. F., & Lawrence, D. (eds.) *Integrating Visual and Verbal Literacies*. Winnipeg: Manitoba. Inkshed Publications.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. (1984). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2nd Edition*. Notre Dame: Indiana. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Rinaldi, C. (1999). “Visible Listening.” *ReChild: Reggio Children Newsletter 3*. p.7.
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). (January 2004). *From Granting Council to Knowledge Council: Renewing the Social Sciences and Humanities in Canada*. Vol 1. Ottawa: Canada.
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). (June 2004). “Report of the SSHRC Transformation Conference.” Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities. Winnipeg: Manitoba.
- Taylor, Charles. (2004). *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: NC. Duke University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.