What’s Your Story?

Cultural Mapping – Best Practices Manual for Rediscovering Small Town Canada

by Johanna Rowe
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\(^1\) The views expressed in this document are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.
Preface

While working on a community adjustment project for the Town of Wawa, Ontario I started reading about asset based community building and cultural mapping. The community adjustment process was occurring in Wawa because my vibrant 100 year old home town felt like it was dying. It had been hit hard by the disappearance of two major employers based on our rich natural resources. Revenue from seven hydro operations within our municipality had been removed from our tax base, and the provincial government began down-loading major infrastructure costs and support onto the backs of the taxpayers of Wawa.

What Wawa needed was a good old fashioned economic and morale booster! Cultural Mapping was the perfect solution. Its focus is to list all the tangible and intangible assets and resources that make up the natural and cultural landscape of a community. What better way to start focusing on the positive wealth of assets within our region. Many of the assets had been forgotten and some were hidden. Many however were in plain view and had become so common to us that we were simply taking them for granted.

In September of 2011 the Town of Wawa started the Wawa Cultural Mapping Project funded in part by the Province of Ontario Creative Community Prosperity Fund, with the support of the municipality, the Wawa Economic Development Office and the Northern Information Technology Geomatics & Cooperative. Over the next eight months residents found themselves engaged in providing their input on what they love about their hometown. The 2,900 residents provided a list of over 300 natural and cultural resources that they felt were a part of Wawa’s culture.

Although the list of assets was not monumental, the feeling of community pride was extra-ordinary. The workshops provided networking opportunities and resulted in immeasurable interactions which continue to inspire new ideas and creativity in the tourism and business sectors of our town. The mapping process unearthed some hidden gems within our midst which will continue to increase Wawa’s cultural profile in the future.

This Best Practices Manual was one of the deliverables promised in Wawa’s original project proposal. It has manifested to become a helping hand to our neighbors who are struggling with the same challenges found in Wawa.

If you live in rural Canada, and your community or neighborhood needs to provide fertile ground for economic revitalization, I know that this manual is perfect for you. It will provide you with the opportunity to take a break from the negativity and hand you some straightforward advice on how to take that first positive step towards inspiring growth. I guarantee that the longer your list of assets becomes, the more residents become involved, and the deeper you dig, the greater the benefits and positive ripple effects will be.

Johanna Rowe, Wawa Cultural Mapping Coordinator
INTRODUCTION

Is this your town?

What happens to the soul of a community when the population drops 40% in the span of 10 years?

What does a community do when their major employers pull out, families are forced to make the heart-breaking decision to stay or go?

What thoughts go through our heads when entire blocks on the main downtown thoroughfare are vacant, abandoned and up for sale?

What visions come to mind when the Municipal debt and infrastructure costs continuously grow, while revenue and Federal and Provincial support continuously dwindle?

The current Canadian landscape is dotted with communities that fit this description. All Canadians know more than a town or two that fit into this category. Perhaps you grew up in such a town, and perhaps you are a current resident of one of these towns. These communities all have two things in common.

One – the residents fear that their community’s best years are behind them and things will never be the same again. And

Two – things WILL never be the same again and the residents are the KEY to their community’s brighter future.

“I don’t know who invented water, but it wasn’t a fish.” Marshall McLuhan

It is human nature to take your surroundings for granted. As we grow and evolve in one place, we stop recognizing the uniqueness and special character of our home environments. It is only when Great Aunt Pat or your old high school classmate comes for a visit that you see your surroundings through outsider’s eyes and perhaps get a sense of what is truly distinctive and extraordinary about your hometown.

This is where the phenomenal, effective and straight forward technique of Cultural Mapping comes into play.

Your Town is a Cultural Entity

Early 20th Century visionary Lewis Mumford recognized the value of communities. His celebrated work The City in History declared that truly healthy population centres evolved in relationship to their natural surroundings and the culture and values of the residents who called it home. These communities portray a quality of place which becomes the single most important asset that a neighborhood,
community or region can offer to residents, entrepreneurs and businesses in today’s dynamic and
technologically savvy world.

A Cultural Map is the first step

Creating a cultural map of your community’s distinct assets is the first step in identifying and celebrating
your town’s unique character.

What is it? “Cultural mapping is a systematic approach to identifying and classifying a community’s
cultural resources.” (E. Bird, City of Toronto, Public Sector Digest, 2010, Cultural Mapping and Cultural
Planning: Making the Connection) Cultural mapping takes both tangible and intangible information to
create a document/database/map which highlights your community’s authentic story and defines your
uniqueness.

What are cultural resources? Cultural components of our society have been categorized by Statistics
Canada into 6 main categories. They are:

1. Community Cultural Organizations – religious/spiritual, community arts, historical and
genealogical, aboriginal, multicultural

2. Creative Cultural Industries – architecture, photography, advertising graphic design, libraries and
archives, authors and journalists, radio and television broadcasting, bookstores and music
stores, art dealers-suppliers, pottery and ceramics, theatre companies, commercial galleries,
publishing industries, film/video/sound recording

studios, art galleries, museums, theatres, design studios, visual and performing arts facilities,
arenas, sports fields, libraries and archives

4. Festivals & Events – gallery and studio tours, performing arts/film festivals, derbies,
tournaments, aboriginal events, craft festivals, sporting events, country fairs, museum
programs, public art tours, gallery and studio tours, cultural heritage tours

5. Cultural Heritage – aboriginal sites, cemeteries, buildings, archaeological sites, heritage districts,
heritage corridors, industrial heritage sites, living history sites, cultural landscapes, historic sites,
oral history

6. Natural Heritage – waterfalls, nature parks, provincial/national parks, natural history sites,
conservation authorities, botanical/zoo logical gardens, bird/wildlife sanctuaries, gardens and
forests, farms and orchards, scenic destinations

Tangible information is quantitative. It is obvious and touchable, such as:
• People, statistics, demographics
• Buildings, structures, architecture
• Archaeological sites, artifacts, photographs, documents, archival material
• Geography, geology, flora, fauna

Intangible items are qualitative and more elusive but no less important. They may include:

• Stories, legends, folklore
• Seasons
• Lifestyle
• Character

Some inspired larger urban centres and regions have taken on cultural mapping as a tool to identify links, networks, resources and usage of cultural assets in a given community, neighborhood or group. Their maps are generally focused on solving a particular problem or driven by a specific objective. The mapping exercise helps identify resources, assets and opportunities which will all become an integral part of the solution.²

For smaller towns and rural areas, the cultural mapping process can take on a more general focus, but no less significant analysis of the authentic story that is intertwined throughout the fabric of the entire community.

Cultural Mapping is actually the first step in the process of developing a community cultural plan. A cultural plan will integrate the data collected during the mapping exercise as a foundation for creating a vision, strategies and direction for community cultural development. See Appendix B for a list of resources on Cultural Planning.

**The Benefits are Extraordinary and Immeasurable**

You live in your town for a reason. Actually I bet there are more than a dozen reasons. When was the last time you heard anyone at the local coffee shop talking about all the reasons they continue to be a resident of the community? Cultural mapping engages your neighbors in a fun and positive, community-building exercise. A Cultural Map rallies the troops and gets townspeople to talk about all of the local resources and assets.

Do you feel like your town is dying? Then let’s talk about all the things in your town that are surviving and know that they can be thriving. A Cultural Map is an opportunity to:

- Collect information and data

² The internet can provide you with a look at community cultural successes like London, Ontario – Creative City Task Force, and Peterborough, Ontario – Culture Lives Here.
• Inform residents and visitors
• Network between organizations and citizens
• Identify gaps and opportunities
• Focus on the positive
• Increase community pride
• Spark entrepreneurial spirit

STEP ONE – Goals & Objectives
Like any project, the first essential step is to identify your project objective. What is your goal? What is the all-important question you are trying to answer? It might be:

Who are we?
What do we need to know?
What makes us unique?

For the Town of Wawa, my goal was to get people excited about their community. I knew that the majority of residents needed a huge morale boost. For over two decades Wawa seemed to be the target of every possible negative trend that a small rural community could handle. Every source of revenue for the municipality was closed, crushed, killed or buried while the cost of providing basic infrastructure to a remote northern Ontario town was growing daily.

But even while our downtown became deserted, the citizens continued to attract impressive numbers of visitors and past residents to school and church reunions, winter carnivals, hockey tournaments, bonspiels, fishing derbies, Canada Day celebrations, and historic anniversaries. Each one of these events provided incredible feedback and became a renewed source of community pride and focus on all the great reasons we choose to live here.

Bottom line - we need to focus on the positive!

STEP TWO – Target Audience
With the objective in mind, you also need to identify WHO this map is for? The purpose of your cultural map should be cognizant of the intended audience.

• Is the data collected targeted at the decision-makers and leaders in your community?
• Will the information be a resource for entrepreneurs?
• Will the results provide inspiration and attract visitors?
Since your cultural mapping project is likely funded through a combination of municipal and provincial sector programs, you also need to ensure you are able to answer the ultimate question “what does the taxpayer get out of this?” Also:

- What are the ultimate plans for the information?
- How will your target audience access/receive the information?
- What is the best type of media (newspaper, slide show, website, etc.) to get the most impact and distribution for your map?

**STEP THREE – Partners and Collaborators**

While you are still forming a vision for your map, you also need to keep in mind the partners who will be providing the information, collecting the data, creating the final map, and keeping it up to date. The roles and responsibilities for everyone need to be outlined at the beginning. They may change and evolve as the project moves forward, but as long as there is a regular and open line of communication between all participants and no one can say they were not in the loop, the project should move forward smoothly and the expected results will be accomplished.

You as an individual will likely not be able to collect all the primary data you need to have a complete picture for your cultural map. You may need to request assistance from a variety of municipal, provincial and federally funded agencies that have special access to certain information. For instance, your local Economic Development Office, Post-Secondary Schools or Community Futures Development Corporation pay Statistics Canada for the most up to date census information. Data sharing agreements on current population trends, education levels, housing market and household income may need to be provided prior to making the final mapping results available to the public.

The data collected also needs to be defined in a way that can be efficiently utilized by your target audience in a user-friendly and accessible format. For instance if you are hoping to develop an actual map, your partners should include individuals who are skilled in G.I.S. software. The information will need to be compatible with whatever type of database they plan to utilize to create an accurate and useful final map.

Of course, some of the assets and cultural resources you identify will be intangible and difficult to give a physical point on a map. This resource can however be part of an accessible list which may direct the visitor to a website link or contact information which can provide further information. Or the list may be simply that, a list which conveys the point that this item was significant enough to be submitted as an important element of the community.

Do not forget to identify and acknowledge your partners and information sources. If your project is running on the approval of a government funded program or collection of programs, always remember
to acknowledge their support in any of your printed material or presentations. Guidelines for when and how this information should be presented or displayed will be included in the final contract agreement signed by your organization. For instance, you may be required to simply mention the name of the agency or you may also need to display their logo. It is always best to thank as many supporters as possible, even if their contribution is in principle only. Everyone likes to see and hear their names mentioned unless of course they specifically ask to remain anonymous.

STEP FOUR – Information Sources and Resources
Perhaps with the help of some of your key partners, make a complete list of different sources of material and information to include in the cultural map. A basic list of sources for an accurate cultural map of your community might include:

- business profile
- tourism directory
- Statistics Canada
- Economic Development Office
- Library
- Local archives – photos, books, articles, studies, reports on the area
- Ministry of Natural Resources District Office – land use reports, surveys, photos, parks
- School board office
- Town Hall
- Local museum, art gallery or historical society
- Tourist information centre
- Post-secondary campus
- Employment centre
- Literacy coalition
- Chamber of Commerce
- Business Improvement Association
- Municipal Tourism and Recreation department
- Ontario/National Parks offices in region

The most important resource in your community are the citizens. In order to truly get the community engaged and reap the highest benefits from your cultural mapping project, you need to get as much participation by as many citizens as possible. You want to include the greatest diversity of ages, sectors, lifestyles and backgrounds. Since we know that small communities survive on the energy and drive of the volunteers, these will likely be your biggest sector of participants. And as we also know that almost
every volunteer wears a variety of hats at any one time, you are likely going to kill two birds with one stone when you involve any particular volunteer in giving their input.

**How do you engage the community?**

Encouraging input from as many residents as possible can be a challenge. It should be recognized that every individual may need to be approached in a different way. Especially considering the emergence of the techno savvy generation, you will have to be creative and adaptable in order to maximize your percentage of participants from all age groups in your community.

Some suggestions you might consider are:

- mail out survey of questions
- Monkey Survey – an online survey format ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com))
- One-on-one interviews
- Group presentations, round table discussions
- Pamphlet/brochure with section for input (see Appendix A)
- Website with input form and contact information
- Articles and interviews in local media
- Facebook Page requesting “likes”, providing updates and requests for input
- Posters in strategic locations in the community complete with marker and section for input
- Drop in locations where residents can stop by at their leisure to give their input
- Invitation to a lunch workshop to gather information
- Youtube video/slideshow requesting input on the project
- Podcast focused on the project and requesting input
- Displays at local events
- Twitter feeds
Taking advantage of the internet options is strongly encouraged. You will likely find that the greatest percentage of feedback and comments will come from this source. And although you may think that you will only be reaching the younger generation, statistics show that social media tools like Facebook are growing in popularity with the 35 to 54 age group. And depending on how far reaching your networking skills are, you will not only be reaching residents, but also those ex-patriots who cannot help but keep tabs on what is happening in their home town. Feedback from this sector is beneficial as it sometimes reminds current residents of the elements and assets that they take for granted.

Facebook and websites can also provide you with current statistics on how many folks are actually visiting your site and keeping tabs on the progress of your project. This can provide you with much needed immediate feedback and also encourage you to keep the momentum going with regular updates and topics of discussion.

The Wawa Cultural Mapping project used a variety of the options listed above. The most productive and beneficial were the Wawa Culture Facebook Page and a working luncheon.

The www.facebook.com/wawaculture page was designed by our Municipal I.T. Department in a simple format which provided photographs, definitions, podcasts, and links to other cultural mapping resources. The website also included an updates page which showed the progress of the project, and a form for people to email their input. A list for each category of cultural assets and resources was kept current so visitors could see which items had already been submitted.
The Cultural Mapping luncheon was by invitation only which included emails, RSVP’s and follow-up phone calls to confirm the numbers. Free food is always a great way to attract people’s attention! In a small community where distance is not a big problem, lunch is the perfect time to schedule a meeting which will not conflict with evening activities and busy work days. The agenda for the workshop was simple and straightforward. It started with a brief explanation of the project and what was required from the participants. With scribes at hand and lots of flip chart paper, we went through each category of cultural resources and brainstormed while we feverishly wrote everything down. We walked away with over 250 solid assets!!
One of the other fun methods of encouraging input was an attractive poster which was placed in strategic locations throughout the community. The poster was large enough to promote the project and give enough information for by-standers to understand what was being asked. The project brochures were also available on the board for additional information. The attached marker and colour-coded blank spaces were filled by citizens of all ages who just happened to be walking by. The most productive poster location was in the lobby at the municipal community centre and arena which is the centre of activity for any small town during the winter months. Suggestions for other high traffic locations could include:

- School lobbies
- Seniors/Youth Drop-In Centres
- Library
- Town Hall
- Museum/Art Gallery

**STEP FIVE – Data collection and analysis**

As you are collecting the data, you need to remember that this information is going to be entered into a database which may require a geographical location and description which will give the asset some context. The Wawa Cultural Mapping data was inputted in an excel spreadsheet through an Access database program customized by our computer savvy employees for our specific needs. Both the Cultural Resources and Sub Category components had drop down menus for ease in selecting the different elements associated with each asset being entered. The following section was submitted by our talented I.T./G.I.S.\(^3\) Technician. The explanation would be best interpreted by your I.T. guru. And remember, this is only a suggestion. You may come up with a different method however this worked well for us.

\(^3\) I.T. = information technology and G.I.S. = geographic information system
Data storage and geographical display best practice:

Both the data storage and organization were fashioned in Microsoft Access. An Access database was created with corresponding Form for ease of data entry and data consistency. Examples of data to include in the database:

- cultural resource type,
- sub type (broad association),
- specific asset name,
- description,
- longitude/latitude (for G.P.S. locations),
- address (street number, street name, postal code),
- phone, fax and website.

At this early stage of the project it is important to decide how you would like the data to be displayed in the final deliverables. Do you want one asset to have three different resource descriptors, or do you want one asset to be repeated three times for each of the three descriptors which it characterizes? It would be advantageous to speak with whomever will be creating the spatial layers to make sure that you have all the necessary data and that it is organized in a way that accurate mapping is possible. These types of decisions will determine how you can map your cultural assets later on.

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4 G.P.S. = global positioning system
The G.I.S. software we used was ESRI’s ArcGIS 10 to create the maps and display the data. The points were created using either G.P.S. coordinates or manually placing the point for each asset. Remember to think of unique identifiers that can correspond with your Access database. Once the points are created the Access database can be connected and joined to their physical location. Each point will now contain all the descriptors from your database. Spatial analysis such as buffers or cluster analysis can show where assets are concentrated within your community. To display your community assets in Google software choose an appropriate symbol for each category in ESRI’s ArcGIS. Use the tools provided to convert your shapefile layer to kml\(^5\) layers. They can now be uploaded and displayed on Google maps or Google earth for the rest of the world to easily see!

**Continuous Promotion and Engagement**

Providing regular updates and open lines of communication is important in maintaining interest and engagement between residents and the cultural mapping project. Keeping the project in the public eye in a positive and productive light is the key to ensuring support and success.

If time and energy allows, it is worth the effort to continue scheduling presentations and publishing articles in the media. Even though you think you may have covered all your bases, there is always someone or some group who may not have been tuned in to the project and can still provide input and benefits.

Since the main focus of the Wawa Cultural Mapping Project was to boost community pride, we tried to keep the project well covered in the local media and provided a number of articles outlining the impressive results. Near the end of the project, there were six consecutive weeks where an article was written, each focusing on one of the six categories of cultural resources. The importance of the resource to the community was highlighted and then a complete list of the assets and resources accumulated and shared by the citizens was listed for all to see. These articles then become the basis of the final report and results posted on the website. Links to the articles were also highlighted, “shared” and “liked” on the Facebook page. All of these methods of distributing the final results received positive comments and feedback from the community.

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\(^5\) kml = keyhole markup language which is a file type used by web-based browsers to display maps
STEP SIX – Cultural Map and Final Report

Once you have completed your data collection, data entry and created your database or map, it is important to create a final report and summary of the findings. While there will likely be a requirement for a final report as per your contract, it is also good form to provide the public, as well as those that provided input and support, with a look at the results. Everyone likes to see some sort of outcome as a result of their contributions as well as acknowledgement for their support.

Different options for presentation of the final results could include:

- Power point presentation to community groups and supporters
- Power point presentation transferred to podcast/video on website or Facebook page
- Written report mailed to contributors
- Article in the local media

The final report should include an analysis of the results as well as highlights of some of the information collected. Perhaps there were some unexpected findings or outcomes which will be beneficial to the community. Or perhaps there were some activities or projects that occurred during the cultural mapping project which resulted as a direct by-product of your work. Definitely something worth mentioning!

During the Wawa Cultural Mapping project, information sharing and networking opportunities led to the rejuvenation of the local Heritage Committee as well as the initiation of a Community Arts Project involving the Municipal Tourism Department, the Wawa Public Library, Ecole St. Joseph and community artists. The project was also able to offer a workshop for neighboring communities wishing to learn about the cultural mapping possibilities for their own purposes.
The Next Step

The Final Report is a prime time to provide recommendations and highlight future desires and opportunities for community leaders to potentially focus on. Point out the obvious benefits and reasons why the mapping results are important.

This is also the perfect time to reinforce the need to proceed to the next logical step, a Municipal Cultural Plan. The purpose of the M.C.P. is to take the results of the cultural map and create a framework which assists the local government in viewing future growth and development through a cultural lens. This enlightened perspective about your community’s unique story ensures that the culturally significant elements and local assets are preserved, promoted and enhanced for the future vibrancy of your town.

CONCLUSION

If you are like me, the decision you make to live in a community is based on the quality of life you enjoy and cherish. Whether your priorities are a decent job, being close to family, living in a safe neighborhood, enjoying access to outdoor recreation, or simply knowing that home is where the heart is, you refuse to be a part of the negative discussions about the death of your town.

This manual shows you how to utilize cultural mapping in a straightforward format. Admittedly, a great cultural map will require a funding source to ensure the highest quality of results. However, at its core, this mapping tool is really just about getting the residents in your community to focus on themselves and rediscover what is in their own back yards. The more you can engage your neighbors and community leaders in discussing all of your amazing assets, the more healthy and attractive your town will become for residents, entrepreneurs and visitors to your unique community. The future is literally in your hands…
Appendix A – Cultural Mapping Brochure

Wawa has 100’s of cultural & natural assets!

Who, What and Where are they?
The Wawa Community Cultural Mapping Project is asking for your input to create an inventory of natural and cultural resources and assets in the Wawa area.

What are natural and cultural resources & assets?
Use this brochure as a guide to identifying the six categories of resources and assets while you think of examples in your own backyard! The Wawa and surrounding area.

WHY? A community that knows its assets is a community that attracts entrepreneurs, visitors and business development!

Send us your list.
Email us at culture@wawa.on.ca or drop off this brochure at the Wawa Public Library, Methuen Memorial Centre Pro Shop or the Town Hall.

GIVE YOUR INPUT ON WAWA’S CULTURAL MAP
Community Cultural Mapping is engaging communities to identify, record and analyze their cultural resources. These resources and assets are broken down into the following six categories:

What cultural and natural resources & assets do you know and found in the Wawa area?
Please list them in each category on the side panel and drop the brochure off at the Public Library, Town Hall or the Community Centre Pro Shop. Or you can email your list to us at culture@wawa.on.ca or contact Johanna Koms, Cultural Mapping Coordinator at 705-752-3314 x127.

CREATIVE CULTURAL INDUSTRIES
- music & bookstore
- artists and/or photographers
- gallery/art and studio tours
- broadcasting

COMMUNITY CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS
- religious and spiritual organizations
- community organizations
- cultural and genealogical societies
- aboriginal organizations

SPACES & FACILITIES
- recording and broadcasting studios
- digital media studios
- art galleries and museums
- arenas and outdoor sports facilities

FEATLERS & EVENTS
- aboriginal and multicultural events
- country fairs
- festivals
- heritage/gardens

COMMUNITY CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS
- conservation authorities and preserves
- farms and orchards
- parks
- waterfalls, scenic locations

NATURAL HERITAGE
- bird and wildlife sanctuaries
- botanical and zoological gardens
- historic buildings
- architectural sites
- historic sites
- living history sites
- cultural landscapes
- historic sites
Appendix B – Resources for Cultural Mapping & Cultural Planning


Cultural Mapping Toolkit: A Partnership between 2010 Legacies Now and Creative City Network of Canada