

Mapping the Identity of a City:

Creation a Digital Map of Intangible Cultural Assets in the Downtown (Historic Story-telling about Downtown Buildings)

Roberta Cauchi Santoro is a Post-doctoral Fellow of the University of Guelph Digital Humanities conducting research related to the intangible culture of Downtown London. Together with Robin Armistead, Manager of Culture, we would like to schedule a meeting with LACH in order to explain the aims and objectives of our project and in order to explore how LACH could be of assistance.

Post-doctoral Project Description:

In 2012, the City of London Culture Office together with its community partners the London Heritage Council and London Arts Council worked with the Canadian Urban Institute and Sierra Planning and Management and Novita Consultants to create the London Cultural Profile. The Profile includes the development of a cultural resource database and mapping capability as well as a calculation of the economic impact of culture for London and an assessment of the state of London's cultural facilities infrastructure, with focus on tangible cultural resources. Although potentially more valuable than the tangible cultural assets, intangible cultural resources have not been explored in equal depth as they require specific methodologies and approaches to be captured and mapped out.

The aim of my post-doctoral research is to define and apply a new methodology to discover intangible cultural resources of the City of London (ON) – i.e. the stories and legends, shared beliefs, customs and rituals, etc. – by analysing underlying cultural dynamics revealed by heritage and neighbourhood associations in the city, and thus associations concerned with the specifically tangible aspects of the city's culture.

Databases of heritage and neighbourhood associations related to London's history, architecture, historic sites and heritage districts in the vicinity of the downtown of London will be mined. Once citizens with multiple of these interests are identified, the latter can be asked to answer a questionnaire (ideally interviewed in person) about:

- 1) Stories, legends, anecdotes related to designated buildings in the downtown
- 2) Shared beliefs about what makes these historic buildings unique
- 3) Shared beliefs about what unique aspects of the city's historic core have been lost
- 4) Customs or rituals that have gone lost and that citizens would like to see revived

Ideally the focus should be on heritage and neighbourhood associations that come from all major heritage areas in London: the downtown area, Old South, Old North, Old East and West of the City, clearly not to the exclusion of city-wide heritage associations.

As such, the aim of this post-doctoral research is to define a methodology aimed at mapping out layers of lived experience of the city with relation to its built heritage in the historic core, layers which are interwoven with more recent and contemporary experiences but which need to be brought back to the fore in order to perhaps better value the present and more-judiciously plan the future. The project aspires to make a contribution to a revitalized downtown that bases its new identity by reviving its old one – emphasizing its authentic heritage and its traditional pedestrian appeal as a means of achieving a distinctive sense of place (and a unique identity) and a distinctive commercial AND cultural character.

This research intends to bring to the fore the way intangible aspects of a city's historic core are indissolubly tied to tangible ones, which explains the choice of historic buildings as a focal point. Particularly with relation to the first year of the project, there are a number of specific issues related to the intangible culture of the historic downtown core that this project would like to address: signage, suggestions about reviving traditions, suggestions about buildings' use with respect to their past, and, suggestions about cultural events that could once more be attempted.