Mapping Culture: Communities, Sites and Stories
May 28-30, 2014 - Coímbra, Portugal

Artéria Workshop

Observations and Prognosis – Sue Stewart
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A. Observations

Participants
We received an enthusiastic and committed group of people, numbering approximately 20, from six principal communities (Coímbra, Viseu, Leiria, Aveiro, Guarda and Castelo Branco), as well as some representation from the regional cultural body. Owing to various outside responsibilities, not all of them could participate for the entire series of sessions, but most communities had more than one representative and so could rely on some continuity. In one case (Leiria), one of the original representatives sent a second person for the second day.

We also hosted a couple of observers as well as drop-ins who joined in the discussions. One drop-in, Carolina, arrived on Day 1 and was present for the entire sequence, working with the Coímbra group. Understandably, Coímbra itself had the largest representation.

The Conference Context
It was gratifying to see quite a number of our participants at the morning sessions for the larger conference. Built into our process was an activity called the Listening Post, which gave them an opportunity to convey the ideas and observations they had gathered at keynotes and plenaries to our own group. My impression is that the plenaries provided a good introduction to the cultural mapping process, as well as some inspiring examples of potential applications.

Process and Materials
All participants received the prepared materials, which were:
-    a summary agenda, a cultural mapping summary guide and a set of worksheets.

The other major element of materials was a series of images and questions contributed by each participant member group, constituting the results of the Question Campaign. These images and questions were posted on the meeting room wall.

Structure
We employed a strategy of setting the participants a series of exercises and tasks to be carried out with our guidance and oversight. Under Ceasar McDowell's direction, we set out a very precise agenda and timeline, and managed to maintain both with few significant changes or overages. The tasks led up to and included the outline of a cultural mapping project for each group, at their discretion and inspiration as to content, and ultimately consideration of the structure and strategies for the entire regional network.

The participants required little motivation from us, and relatively little specific guidance. What they were expected to do seemed to be amply clear.

One thing we might have done differently is to have provided, at the outset, a brief introduction to the network itself and to general principles of cultural mapping. The methods and means of mapping were covered in our immediate instructions and in the guidesheet and worksheets, and

the larger historical and political aspects were alluded to in the keynotes and plenaries. Nonetheless, it might have been useful to the participants to have these principles clearly expressed in a more formal way as they started into their process.

Outcomes – Cultural Mapping
All of the groups, with one possible exception, came away with the outline of a cultural plan involving mapping techniques:
- In three cases (Coímbra, Viseu and Aveiro), the plan involved producing a form of physical, electronic and/or multidisciplinary "map".
- The representatives of two of the communities, Guarda and Castelo Branco, put their heads together to plan an Australian-style historical representation for each of their respective towns, one that would be identity- and event-based and would involve the participation of city residents.
- The sixth group (Leiria) was unable to commit fully to a process owing to a lack of resources, in particular person-power. Their project was to establish a local arts council and therefore involved some fundamental political action. Some other participants commented that the ruling politics would be very hard to negotiate in that particular community.
- The proposed electronic maps (Viseu and Aveiro) were intended to focus on the arts and culture community itself, in order to assist it in identifying and sharing its own resources. The process therefore did not ostensibly involve the larger community. However, on a lighter note, from what I saw of Viseu and its performing arts festival, almost everyone in the city over the age of 12 would be involved in such a survey.

B. Prognosis - Upcoming Needs and Challenges

Community Plans and the Network
To be kept in mind is that the goal of the workshop was dual, involving both a) the individual communities and their own projects, and b) the communities and their relationship to the network and to one another within the network. The goal of producing a plan for a community project was intended to be secondary to that of consolidating the network. Its purpose was to provide an exercise in mapping, in order to transmit the principles and process, and of course to allow participants to benefit more fully from the unique learning opportunity provided by the conference itself.

Community Plans
The level of enthusiasm to carry out the plans was very high. However, it is hard to say whether the planning was viewed as an academic exercise or whether there was, with signal exceptions, a real determination to carry out the proposed project.

In both exceptional cases, those of Viseu and Coímbra, there appeared to be sufficient resources and interest to complete at least the initial "map". The challenge would be to see it sustained.

In the case of Aveiro, a complicity with Viseu and an enthusiastic and savvy representative could well see the completion of another resource map, in electronic form in both instances. Again, there's the question of sustainability over time.

Castelo Branco and Guarda proposed the identity- and event-based projects. Their projects are very ambitious and would require deployment of many resources, and the cities were only represented by single individuals. However, one of those individuals is involved with both the local cultural authorities and a local arts organization, and the two representatives formed an

apparently strong bond through discussion of their projects, which bodes well for mutual support. Those two were also among the most faithful in attending the morning sessions, so their motivation is high. They might require some coaching to identify the larger objective of their respective project, e.g., celebration of identity, promoting tourism, or other.

Leiria remains uncertain and under-resourced. The representatives could need additional encouragement and support in formulating their plan, since their process will have to start from a very basic level of organization.

The Network
To some extent, the workshop functioned as a sort of "cultural mapping" of the network members who were present, for the purposes of the network. Perceived advantages of the workshop for the network are:
- allowing the participants to get to know one another and the other communities, including being exposed to the "questions" or issues raised by other communities and discovering how they intersect with their own. This was a significant and definitive step taken on Day 1, with reference to the Question Campaign.
- discussion of the common themes or concerns identified in the Question Campaign. This aspect of the workshop elicited a great deal of participant interaction that I believe will contribute directly to consolidating the network and establishing its objectives.
- participants experiencing a planning process using cultural mapping methods. Having examined their respective resources and the means and methods required to carry out their own project, the participants will be better prepared to extrapolate to the network's structure and strategy and to perceive opportunities for collaboration.

Participants therefore went away primed for further exploration of the network's potential to assist them and what kinds of resources they can bring to it. There were already two instances of inter-community collaboration.

A great deal of momentum was built up over the three days of the workshop, and it would be a shame to see that momentum diminish. One challenge will be to maintain it and to keep the various issues (themes) fresh in the minds of the participants.

Another challenge will be to update potential network members who were not able to attend on the results of the workshop. In this connection, I'm not thinking of the community plans, but rather of the issues that were discussed, some of the ideas and concepts from the larger conference that were remarked upon, and common problems that were identified. Another element to be communicated is the resource "identity" of the various communities established during the cultural mapping exercise.

Themes – Question Campaign
The major themes that emerged from the Question Campaign should be noted. Of a couple of dozen "questions" formulated by participants, five were commonly expressed, caught the participants' attention and became the topics of lively group discussion. They are:
1. Networks and collaboration
2. Attracting new audiences, e.g., university students
and as a subset of 2:
3. Working with schools
4. Audience attendance, involvement and participation
5. Cultural policy