

This is an extract from *Canadian Mural Communities: A Summary Report on the Spread and Use of Murals as a Tourism Strategy* by Dr. Rhonda L. Koster of Lakehead University 2005

Chemainus as the Epicentre of Mural Development

As the previous maps, table and generation tree suggest, many of the communities stated that the idea for mural development either originated or can be traced back to Chemainus, British Columbia. In order to better understand the decision making surrounding mural development and community economic development in general, it is important therefore to examine the situation at Chemainus more comprehensively.

As part of their economic transition, Chemainus experienced both threats of, and actual, mill closures starting from the early 1970s. In 1983 the major mill was finally closed, with a loss of 650 jobs. When the mill reopened two years later, only 10 percent of the employees were hired back (Barnes and Hayter 1992). The closure and minimal rehiring had a devastating impact on the local economy, and Chemainus was forced to face the realities of not being able to rely on its traditional economic base. The situation was worsened by the construction of new shopping centres outside the community, which threatened the viability of local downtown merchants. Becoming a bedroom community for Nanaimo to the north was limited due to distance. Also, because it was not located directly on the ocean and therefore had no access to beach frontage, it appeared that Chemainus did not have natural environmental assets to assist its development as a resort community (Lehr and Kentner-Hidalgo 1998).

The community needed to move beyond its primary industry dependency and turned to tourism, specifically murals, to do so. In the early 1980s, Chemainus received a provincial grant from the British Columbia government to rejuvenate the main streets of the town. A new mayor for the community asked a local entrepreneur, Karl Schutz, to come out of retirement and assist in preparing a plan for the town's development. Schutz agreed and his dream of creating a 'renaissance' in Chemainus began.

Schutz set about convincing the local municipal council and community that it was a good idea to revitalize their community on mural-based tourism. The town's residents were skeptical of the idea but the revitalization committee pushed ahead and eventually the municipal council agreed to commit \$10,000 to commission the first five murals (Meisler 1994). The mural themes were based on a book and photographs by Olsen (1963) entitled *Water over the Wheel*, a history of Chemainus, and attempted to represent the ethnic, economic and social history of the region.

In 1982 the first five murals were painted and by 1986 the number of murals had expanded to over a dozen. Forty new businesses had also opened to cater to the nearly 250,000 annual visitors (Barnes and Hayter 1992). As of 2002, Chemainus has thirty-four murals, boasts over 400,000 annual visitors, is home to many thriving shops catering to tourists and has developed into a vibrant artistic community (Chemainus Festival of Murals Society 2002). According to the Chamber of Commerce, Chemainus receives eight to ten tour buses per day from April to October, officials from around the world have come to study the applicability of mural projects to their own communities (most recently from Japan and Taiwan) and in 1995 the Chemainus Murals won the British Airways "Tourism for Tomorrow" Excellence Award (survey results 2002). Along with the

positive tourism sector, the mill in Chemainus continues to be profitable and a major employer in the community.

Although disputed by Schutz as a factor, the importance of place situation has to be considered in Chemainus' success (Schutz 2002). The town is located along one of British Columbia's most intensely traveled tourism corridors between the island-mainland ferry terminal at Nanaimo and the provincial capital of Victoria. This traffic undoubtedly provided the community with an enviable advantage over other communities that do not have access to this large flow of potential visitors. Due to the success of 'The Little Town that Did' (the copyrighted slogan attached to the community as part of its marketing strategy), Schutz has become a key figure in the spread of mural-based tourism development to many communities across Canada. Due to his influence in the diffusion of mural-based tourism strategies, the next section provides a more detailed look into the man behind the idea.

The Man Behind the Murals – Karl Schutz

Karl Schutz was born in Heidelberg, Germany and immigrated to Canada in 1951 at the age of 21 to work as a journeyman machinist (Meisler 1994). Like many others at that time, he settled in Chemainus and was employed by the MacMillan Bloedel sawmill. After five years, Schutz left and developed a very successful woodworking shop and by 1971 had acquired considerable landholdings, sold his business and retired (Meisler 1994). While vacationing in Europe during 1970, Schutz visited 15th to 16th century outdoor 'frescoes' or murals on the walls of monasteries in Romania. These murals left such an impression that he felt Chemainus could utilize the same idea to build and attract a tourism industry, especially as the town was already struggling with threats of mill closure and downsizing. He took the idea to the Chemainus Chamber of Commerce in 1971, but it was rejected (Schutz 2002).

However, as indicated in the previous section, in the 1980s the mayor of Chemainus invited Schutz to come out of retirement and assist in the town's revitalization. The centerpiece of Schutz's revitalization plan was mural development; a focus that many on the revitalization committee and within the community more broadly did not support (Meisler 1994; Schutz 2002). Committee and community members alike did not want to base their community's future development on tourism, but Schutz "told them tourism is a billion-dollar industry all over the world. Before the war, Heidelberg existed because of it. My divorced mother supported us by running a bed-and-breakfast" (Meisler 1994, 58). The current success of Chemainus as a tourist destination illustrates the truth of Schutz's words. However, he stressed that mural development is only the beginning or centerpiece of a larger tourism development plan for a community and is not the recipe for instant success.

Everyone I coach I tell that if you think that when the murals are painted, the job is done then don't even start. Because once the murals are finished, then the work begins. Like in Chemainus, like in every other ...community that was so successful, it is only the key. In Chemainus now because of the murals we have the dinner theatre, a \$4 Million investment. Well that is the next step. It employs 40 to 45 people and it pays \$35,000 a year in taxes to the municipality. They created a brand new economy. They're now on a \$1.5M expansion program. So here again, the murals were only a key to the other industry coming in because the new 50 to 100 stores which we got

downtown, they only came because the murals and of course those new stores created commerce (Schutz 2002).

Schutz stresses that it is the spin-off developments that communities need to focus on and nurture. The winning combination is art, tourism, marketing, a “view outside of the box, and the leadership qualities and conviction to do it” (Schutz 2002).

As one of the key elements to mural-based tourism projects, he felt that both creativity and visibility in marketing were critical. As an example, he copyrighted the phrase ‘The Little Town That Did’ and utilized it on pamphlets, posters, and even on lapel badges that he wore everywhere. The slogan was captivating, intriguing and slightly amusing, resulting in a proliferation of questions from people who would read the phrase and ask its meaning. Schutz was happy to provide the ‘Cheminus story’ and people became interested in the town and in the idea of mural development more broadly.

This marketing strategy benefited both Chemainus as a destination and Schutz personally. He has become one of the leading experts on mural-based tourism strategies, and as a result has contracted his services to other communities across Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand that are interested in exploring and pursuing a similar strategy. His role is one of facilitator, providing one to two day workshops/ seminars for small groups of leaders in which he teaches “them everything they need to know about the project, how to find the artists, how to prepare the walls, how to get the bylaws they need to protect the murals” (Schutz 2002). He is also the president and founder of the Global Mural, Arts and Cultural Tourism Association (GMACTA), established in 1996 after Schutz attended a Mural Festival in New Zealand.

Another key element enabling the successful development of a mural-based tourism strategy is leadership, but that “does not mean that one individual does it all. ... The only way you are able to achieve your goals is with the dedication and cooperation of others. But it does take leadership to get the cooperation. If you are unable to draw people into your world, then you will not succeed. It has to be an individual; a group or committee never works” (Schutz 2002). Further, Schutz has found that when several communities jointly sponsor a workshop session, it does not work. He has found that community rivalry is detrimental to the process as each community tries “to protect themselves for all the wrong reasons. They don’t think of creating a destination” (Schutz 2002). He cites a contract he had in New Zealand as an example.

...Two communities hired me jointly to split the cost of getting me there. One of them forged ahead like gangbusters and the other one didn’t do anything, and then blamed the successful one for taking all the lead. Well it was strictly their fault because they were not doing anything. They just watched what the other one was doing and thought it would rub off on their community (Schutz 2002).

Schutz suggests leadership is the key factor in the successful development of any businesses, organization or municipality. To him, cities and towns that are thriving and expanding are doing so because they have a strong mayor. In cases where the mayor does not have leadership qualities and instead is only a good “manager of sewer and water” the community will not develop with the same vitality. Schutz says he can sense immediately whether or not the leadership in the community has the necessary qualities to undertake the project and if it is apparent that it will not work, he lets them know that “they are wasting their money and my time. Unfortunately I’d say about 25 percent of them just waste their money” (Schutz 2002).

Because the key to continuing community or project vitality is leadership, a change in leadership can mean that the project will “level out or die away” (Schutz 2002). However, if leadership succession plans have been developed and if the replacement leader is strong, development may continue or even expand. Leadership qualities are critical, and Schutz suggests that if you examine any organization, the result is the same. “Ask anybody on the Chamber of Commerce and they will tell you that you have great years, you have flat years and you have down years and it only depends on the president” (Schutz 2002).

Schutz believes this to also hold true for rural communities, where some are more innovative and successful because they have a strong mayor or strong economic development officer (EDO) propelling them. However, Schutz cautions that EDOs are not always the best people to lead a strategy because quite often they are merely “holding a job” and have no real vested interest in the community. Instead,

they are doing research. I know cities and communities ...[that] spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on research and it is a waste of money. What they should have done was used those dollars on a project and instead of sitting on a shelf collecting dust that project would have attracted tourists and industry. Because when you have a snowball going down the hill, it just grows and grows, getting bigger and bigger. But you first had to have the nucleus to start with (Schutz 2002).

Interestingly, Schutz indicated that there has been a noticeable gender change in leadership over the past 30 years. “...In many instances, especially over the last 10 years, it has been more the women that have been taking that leadership role than the men. There was a big switch in...the late 1980s. Through the 80s I dealt with men exclusively. And in the 90s it was more and more women and lately, ...[with some] exception ... it is women who have started the projects” (Schutz 2002). He suggests that this change is because women have strong leadership qualities as a result of their traditional role as home-maker, a role he views as an important administrative position that manages the commerce of the family, not unlike the positions men have traditionally held in business.

...Women ran the commerce at home and that is big business - it is an administrative... position to manage the family home. The more kids you have the more complex it gets. So they have always been in the leadership role but they have not done that on a community basis or business basis. And now it seems that they have given up that role. Women have less children and they have children and still go in the work place outside of the home and they are as effective there as they were in the home for hundreds of years (Schutz 2002).

The data collected for this research project not support his assertion, as the majority of mural committees currently operating in various Canadian communities are not lead by women. Instead, there is an even gender distribution of leadership in informal board structures. More women (eight of fourteen) do lead formal board structures. However, within the primary data presented here, it was not possible to ascertain the gender of the person who may have instigated the mural project, only the current leadership.

Despite his insistence that leadership is the key factor in the successful development of any project, he felt he could not cite the specific qualities that make a leader. However, throughout the

interview, he did just that, using words and phrases that described the characteristics of good leaders, such as energy, know-how, dedication, cooperation, passion, a view outside the box, conviction and commitment. At one point he did indicate his view that, "you are either born a leader or you are not" comparing leaders with the European Master Composers who were obviously born with their musical gifts as there was no possible way to accomplish what they did at such a young age (Schutz 2002).

For Schutz, geographical characteristics of place, such as location, access to traveling population or community size would have no influence on the outcome of the strategy. His philosophy is that, "you build a better mouse trap no matter where you are in the world and the world will plough a path to your door" (Schutz 2002). He provided the following example as proof that geographical location has no influence on the success or failure of a business or strategy.

We have locally for instance an entrepreneur and he is a fabulous marketer and is not even a good cook, but he put up a restaurant in the most outlandish place and everyone came there not because of the food, but the whole ambiance. Then he sold that restaurant and opened up another in a different place and within about two years the other one just withered away...because they just haven't got it. It is definitely about individual leadership (Schutz 2002).

When questioned about how a small, relatively isolated community would access a large enough visiting population to make the tourism industry viable, he stated that this was simply missing the point.

Take the crummiest town [*thaf*] you have, and you build an Eiffel tower there and see what happens. Now don't do what most people do and say, well we haven't got enough money and the know-how, we'll only make this Eiffel tower half or 30%, instead of its real size. We'll only build a substitute, half the size. Well forget it. Don't waste your money. If you are not going to do it right, don't do it at all...You have got to go [*to Las Vegas*] if you want to see tourist attractions like I'm talking about ... In all the world's tourist attractions, they are the greatest marketers. And they do it with huge money and they do it absolutely perfect. ... When you want to understand what tourism is all about ... you go to Las Vegas because that is the ultimate of what I'm teaching (Schutz 2002).

Although not concerned specifically with capital investments in tourism, there is evidence to support Schutz's claims to Las Vegas-style development in *urban* centres. Research from within the place marketing and branding literature in tourism suggests that 'fantasy cities' (Hannigan 1998) such as Downtown Disney and Universal City Walk in Orlando, Florida, or NikeTown in New York, are being "touted by developers and city managers ... as the panacea for declining downtowns and suburban shopping centres, signaling the future for public recreation" (Anderton and Klein 1999, 14). As a result, places like Niagra Falls, Ontario, has revamped the amusement strip on Clifton Hill to include recognizable brands such as Planet Hollywood (a restaurant), The Rainforest Café and Hard Rock Café because it 'brings credibility' to the place as a destination (Hannigan 2003).

However, Cai (2002) cautions that branding for rural destinations is an expensive endeavour from the perspective of the operator or community and risky for tourists, because they

are unable to 'test drive' their destination choice prior to leaving. Unlike urban centres such as Las Vegas and Orlando, rural centres do not have the capacity to attract international brands and instead need to create and develop an image that will become recognizable to tourists. Evidence cautions that large-scale investments in remote areas may not garner the expected result in the short term, especially if not undertaken within a larger destination image development and promotion strategy (Cai 2002; Prideaux 2002).

Schutz's view on geography not influencing the success of mural-based tourism developments may also be clouded by his frame of reference. Several of the communities involved in the Global Mural Arts and Cultural Tourism Association (GMACTA) have what can be considered extremely positive geographical site and situation characteristics. For example, Katikati, known as New Zealand's Mural Town, is located along the Pacific Coast Highway; a route identified as potentially one of the best coastal touring routes in New Zealand by the New Zealand Coromandel Peninsula tourism association (Coromandel Peninsula 2003). Another community, Twenty-nine Palms, California, is enviably located next to Joshua Tree National Park (Action Council for Twenty-nine Palms 2003). Finally, Ely Nevada is the gateway to Great Basin National Park, home to the Nevada Northern Railway and is located 320 kilometres northwest of Reno and 245 kilometres northeast of Las Vegas (Nevada Travel Network 2003). Within Canada, Schutz's home community of Chemainus is one hour north of Victoria B.C. and located on one of the main transportation arteries linking the island south to north. Finally, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, another GMACTA member, is located on the Trans Canada highway. All these communities have access to a large traveling population as a function of their location on a major transportation artery, several are located within developed tourism regions while others are located close enough to large centres to facilitate the day trip traveler. Many rural communities do not share these same advantages, and arguably the success of their mural-base tourism projects is hindered by their inaccessibility.

The preceding sections have outlined the characteristics of the mural communities found across Canada, have provided detailed information on both Chemainus, British Columbia as the epicenter for the development and spread of murals across Canada and on Karl Schutz as instrumental in both the success of Chemainus' mural project and the spread of murals. Ultimately it is difficult to be certain of the influence of this individual, as decision making takes place on multiple levels, including both cognizant (an individual agrees or disagrees) and unconscious (influenced by personality and background) levels. The following section provides a more detailed examination using the survey data to explore why the communities chose to develop murals and what the outcomes of those choices have been.

B.) Why Murals?

This research was driven by a desire to determine where the ideas for development came from, why communities choose specific development strategies, and what the outcomes of those choices are. The previous section has provided an answer to the first of these questions, and this section addresses the latter two questions.

Communities of all sizes and in particular those that are considered rural, have sought to establish themselves as unique destinations through place marketing, with tourism becoming an increasingly integral part of that motivation. The findings from this research would support the literature in that mural-based tourism strategies were undertaken primarily to beautify the community in order to attract tourists. As shown in Table 5, 29 percent of the communities cited tourism as one of the reasons for initiating the murals, 19.4 percent cited community beautification

as the sole purpose and 45.2 percent cited a combination of community beautification and tourism product/attraction development. The remaining 6.4 percent cited heritage preservation as the reason for mural development.

When the communities were grouped into the three different periods of development and compared (through crosstabulation) with why murals were chosen, an interesting pattern emerges (Table 5). Tourism development in combination with community beautification remains one of the strongest reasons for developing a mural project across all time periods. However, there is some change in exclusive (tourism OR community beautification) reasons. Whereas community beautification does not even enter into consideration in the first time period, it becomes relatively more important over the next two time periods.