

## COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH AND ITS OUTCOMES: A WEB PORTAL PROJECT IN CAPE BRETON, NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA

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### *Abstract*

Digital multimedia provides new opportunities not only for dissemination of research but also for the research process itself, entwined with creative work and public engagement. It can complement more familiar textual representations and ethnographies in ethnomusicology as well as take them in new directions. In this article, I describe an internet-based digital multimedia research project that I initiated in 2012 in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada. In addition to presenting rationales for its launch, together with theories, research and practice that informed its development and design, I overview and briefly chronicle how it provided opportunities for the development of collaborative interdisciplinary and community-engaged research relationships and methods, as well as the widespread dissemi-

nation of research. Critically reflecting upon this project, and on participant, partner and audience commentary, I observe that there is great potential in multimedia research as well as challenges and limitations.

**Keywords:** collaborative research, community-engaged methodologies, ethnomusicology, digital humanities, interactive multimedia, Eastern and Central European immigrants, Cape Breton, Canada

**Ključne riječi:** suradničko istraživanje, metodologije angažiranja zajednice i angažiranja za zajednicu, etnomuzikologija, digitalna humanistika, interaktivna multimedija, imigranti iz Istočne i Srednje Europe, Cape Breton, Kanada

Researchers, artists, educators, heritage institutions and community organizations recognize the value of, and are increasingly producing, multimedia

resources at/as a nexus of research, creative work and public engagement. Nevertheless, the nature of and potential for these resources is not always evident. Digital multimedia provides new opportunities not only for dissemination of research results but also for the research process itself, entwined with creative work and public engagement. Yet it also opens new challenges. It can complement more familiar textual representations and ethnographies in ethnomusicology as well as take them in new directions. In this article, I describe an internet-based digital multimedia research project that I initiated in 2012 in Cape Breton. In addition to presenting rationales for its launch, together with theories, research and practice that informed its development and design, I overview and briefly chronicle how it provided opportunities for the development of collaborative interdisciplinary and community-engaged research relationships and methods, as well as the widespread dissemination of research to scholars and communities. Finally, critically reflecting upon this project, and on participant, partner and audience commentary about the process and recent project outcomes, I consider implications for this kind of research. There is great potential in multimedia research that facilitates community and public engagement since it is meaningful for local, national and international groups across private, educational (at various levels) and heritage sectors. However, there are also challenges and limitations related to carrying out community-engaged research, particularly when a researcher works with diverse communities and lives among them. What comes sharply into focus is the understanding that *how* we carry out our research is at least as important as *what* we learn by carrying out the research — indeed these are inextricable and interdependent aspects of research.

### *Introducing the Project Rationale and Genesis*

Despite its multiethnic population, due to coalmines and steel mills of the 19th and early 20th centuries that drew diverse immigrant populations, Cape Breton is renowned for its Scottish, Anglo-Celtic and Acadian heritage. This has been emphasized in official discourses in tourism, education and cultural policy,<sup>1</sup> while local businesses, special interest groups and governing bodies have capitalized on Gaelic roots in particular.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the broader region of Nova

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth DONOVAN (ed.): *Cape Breton at 200: Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial, 1785-1985*, University College of Cape Breton Press, Sydney (NS) 1985; Stephen J. HORNSBY: *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal — Kingston 1992; Robert J. MORGAN: *Rise again! The Story of Cape Breton Island*, vol. 1, Breton Books, Toronto 2008; Robert J. MORGAN: *Rise again! The Story of Cape Breton Island: From 1900 to Today*, vol. 2, Breton Books, Toronto 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Michael KENNEDY: *Gaelic Nova Scotia: An Economic, Social and Cultural Impact Study*, Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax 2002.

Scotia has in many ways been »tartanized,« made »Scottish«.<sup>3</sup> People »from away« (as outsiders are often described in Cape Breton) also tend to neglect the diversity on the island, as well as connections that the island's groups have with one another, and with populations in other parts of Canada, and transnationally.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, a collaboratively-achieved and living web portal, titled *diversitycapebreton.ca*, has begun to address this gap in the province's historical and heritage interpretation. Mobilizing existing and emerging research that moves beyond Cape Breton's more familiar Scottish and Acadian characteristics, this web portal explores the island's Eastern and Central European antecedents, in particular Ukrainian, Polish, Croatian and Jewish, thus more fully redefining the island's diverse ethnocultural profile. In this, it takes its cue from several pre-existing cultural initiatives such as the »Interpretive Master Plan« of the Nova Scotia Museum.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing the importance of this research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) provided funding for the web portal project through its *Public Outreach: Dissemination* grant program. The portal is designed to reach diverse audiences and leads to a repository of materials, some born digital and others which have been digitized. It links to distinct websites and sections integrating interactive multimedia resources and opportunities for technology-enriched learning about the significant contributions of Central and Eastern European immigrants and their descendants to the rich social and cultural landscape of Cape Breton. Target audiences of the *diversitycapebreton.ca* web portal include Cape Bretoners of the identified ethnocultural groups and others, people of all generations but with special attention paid to school groups and university students, recent immigrants and potential immigrants from different continents, tourists, researchers, heritage and culture enthusiasts on various continents, as well as general web users.

Besides building on my near-decade-long collaborations with Cape Breton communities (see below), the project has also required the collaboration of a large team of other researchers, consultants and contractors with technical, design and digital resource development expertise. Although *diversitycapebreton.ca* was launched publicly only very recently, in August 2015, findings of the project and of earlier research have already been integrated into site interpretation for tourists, through both onsite interactive multimedia exhibitions and virtual exhibits and a more fully-informed interpretive personnel at heritage institutions and sites. The

<sup>3</sup> Ian MCKAY: Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954, *Acadiensis*, 21 (1992) 2, 5-47; Ian MCKAY, and Robin BATES: *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal — Kingston 2010.

<sup>4</sup> As one example, despite the great many publications and creative works that pertain to the histories and experiences of Ukrainians in Canada, very little attends to the experiences of Ukrainians in Cape Breton.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://museum.novascotia.ca/about-nsm/interpretive-master-plan> (accessed 10 October 2015).

findings have also become the foundation for academic conference papers and have already been cited widely by university-based researchers both for the new information about the region's diverse communities, and for the project's collaborative and emergent method. At the time of writing this article, our team of web and digital resource developers, digital multimedia and ethnomusicology researchers, educational resource developers, faculty and student researchers, and community members are readying the web portal for its celebratory launch in the region where much of the research data has been gathered. It is the aim of our project that the web portal should be a widely-accessible living repository, with a growing body of resources that will provide a long-term web presence for preservation of material, research, and further encouragement of dialogue and exchange among all interested parties.

Much like the project described by Patterson and Risk,<sup>6</sup> this venture is characterized by intense collaboration »*deliberately and explicitly* (...) at every point in the ethnographic process.«<sup>7</sup> It facilitates a co-interpretation — a shared, negotiated representation of the field research. The *diversitycapebreton.ca* web portal aims to serve as a repository that responds to user requests; more innovatively, it proactively interacts with community research partners to initiate the use of materials (including broadcast, a/v recording materials, screenings, workshops, and public presentations in various formats). Our web portal, like the resource of Patterson and Risk, seeks to assist in the »recirculation«<sup>8</sup> and sharing of materials. It aims to establish a cultural »commons«,<sup>9</sup> facilitate dialogue and, potentially, expedite a »critical and reflexive discourse about the social relations of power in cultural representations.«<sup>10</sup>

A dialogic relationship was established with local research participants in the earliest stages of research. It may be understood to have started a decade or so ago with a phone call to Father Roman Dusanowsky, parish priest of the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Catholic Church in Cape Breton. He is a well-known and widely-valued community figure and advocate, so I knew he would be a good person to ask about what I might do to be useful to the community. He advised me to plan

<sup>6</sup> Glenn PATTERSON, and Laura RISK: Digitization, Recirculation and Reciprocity: Proactive Archiving for Community and Memory on the Gaspé Coast and Beyond, *MUSICultures*, 41 (2014) 2, 102-132.

<sup>7</sup> Luke E. LASSITER: *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2005, 16; italics in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Glenn PATTERSON, and Laura RISK: Digitization, Recirculation and Reciprocity: Proactive Archiving for Community and Memory on the Gaspé Coast and Beyond.

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Todd TITON: Folklore, Sustainability, and Public Policy: A Few Thoughts on »Economic Man,« Conservation Biology and the Commonwealth of Culture; keynote lecture at *Sequestering Tradition? A Cultural Sustainability Symposium*, Craftsbury Common (Vermont, U.S.), August 2013; available as an audio file at <http://www.vermontfolkcenter.org/education/cultural-sustainability/abstracts.php> (accessed 14 February 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Sylvia NANNYONGA-TAMUSUZA, and Andrew N. WEINTRAUB: The Audible Future: Reimagining the Role of Sound Archives and Sound Repatriation in Uganda, *Ethnomusicology*, 56 (2012) 2, 209.

an event to meet with community members, and we arranged for an evening of discussion and workshop of Ukrainian music and dance in Canada. Later on, during a series of short-term site visits in 2008-2009, at the request of members of Cape Breton's Ukrainian communities, I created an interactive multimedia exhibit that opened in June 2009 at the Cape Breton University Art Gallery. After conducting archival research and ethnographic interviews with local community leaders and other community members from diverse backgrounds and walks of life, I worked together with Beaton Institute archivist Jane Arnold to curate an exhibit that introduced Cape Breton Ukrainian culture and explored the historical and contemporary practice of Ukrainian stage dance on the island. The exhibit gathered together many material items including icons and other church artifacts, passports and immigration documents, literature and news clippings, photos, recorded music and music scores, instruments, a stage backdrop painted in the 1920s, costumes and stage properties. It is important to emphasize that the publicly available material on Cape Breton Ukrainians up to that time related first of all to a self-published book by a lay community historian.<sup>11</sup> The book, while extensive and recognized for its contribution to local history is, like any monograph, of a limited scope. Thus the author of the book and many other community members were happy to work with me to include in the exhibit a greater variety of perspectives and wider sample of items than had been possible in the book. As a result, thanks to active community engagement, and due to a variety of materials presented through various media, the exhibit managed to present diverse voices from multiple eras, providing a multilayered and complex story of Ukrainian dance and local communities. Cape Breton's Ukrainians were thrilled to be officially included in a public institution, and to have their contributions to the island's culture valued in this way. Many of them continued to work with me and the Beaton Institute in one or another ways in the safeguarding efforts initiated by the exhibit,<sup>12</sup> and joined the discussion on how to deal with the material from the exhibit in order to secure its safe keeping, accessibility as well as respect for individual and/or community ownership.

Namely, in the earliest stages of my research, I was asked to collect materials and deposit them with an archive that, while focusing on Ukrainian culture in Canada, exists in another part of Canada. Community members felt strongly, however, that any items that would be donated to collections should remain in Cape Breton in order to be more readily accessible to members of local

<sup>11</sup> John HUK: *Strangers in the Land: The Ukrainian Presence in Cape Breton*, City Printers, N.p. 1986.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, among the items displayed in the exhibit were handmade costumes, some of which had been inadvertently left, unidentified and unclaimed for a time, among company items at a performance at some point, safeguarded in the private home of a community member charged with costuming for the company. The original owner of one of the costume items was thrilled to see her mother's handiwork in the exhibit, and she was pleased to be able to reclaim the costume item when the exhibit closed.

communities. This is how the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University became the repository for extensive collections that I gathered through my field research on the island. Some items, however, could not be housed at the Beaton for reasons having to do with the archive's mandate and/or capacity or other limitations. For this reason, and also since items donated to Beaton Institute collections become permanent property of the archive, community research participants initiated a discussion of ways in which items could be circulated and shared with locals and people at a distance. It is from this discussion that the idea for the web portal was born. In contrast to the material deposited at the Beaton, which becomes the property of that institution, items that are shared through our web portal have most often been returned to the original owner (unless donated to the project office) and only a digital copy is shared through the portal. Thus the item can be shared and circulated with many, questions can be asked about it, stories can be shared about it, but it remains the property of the original owner.

While in this article I focus on my own contribution to the diversitycapebreton.ca web portal project, the importance of community involvement in such projects I addressed elsewhere<sup>13</sup> and the importance of such community involvements has also been noted in other literature.<sup>14</sup> Further, a larger research program on Eastern and Central Europeans in Cape Breton, which began in 2008 and which is not limited to the web portal, integrates, at its root, an element of advocacy. While aspects of this larger project have also expanded capacities toward developing greater local, cultural and trans-generational sustainability,<sup>15</sup> discussion of this is beyond the focus of the current article.

### *Current Phase of the Web Portal Project*

As noted above, the diversitycapebreton.ca web portal is a living, interactive multimedia resource that houses and presents research about the contributions of diverse ethnocultural groups to the social and cultural landscape of Cape Breton Island. To date, funding has supported content related to Eastern and Central European immigrants and their descendants. Via the portal, users can access an archive of materials such as photos, documents and audio/video recordings (containing, for example, ethnographic interviews and performances). A host of

<sup>13</sup> Marcia OSTASHEWSKI: Engaging Communities and Cultures in Ethnomusicology: An Introduction, *MUSICultures*, 41 (2014) 2, 1-14.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., John VALLIER: Sound Archiving Close to Home: Why Community Partnerships Matter, *Notes*, 67 (2010) 1, 39-49.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Todd TITON: Fieldwork and Applied Ethnomusicology, posted at *Sustainable Music*, 2013, <http://sustainablemusic.blogspot.ca/2013/06/fieldwork-and-applied-ethnomusicology.html> (accessed February 2, 2014); Jeff Todd TITON: Curating Culture, Sustaining Music, posted at *Exhibiting Sound*, 2015, <http://exhibitingound.ca/2015/02/06/curating-culture-sustaining-music/> (accessed February 6, 2015).

interactive resources is also available including: curated exhibits (e.g., collections focused on music, community histories, virtual tours of exhibit installations, panoramic tours of heritage architecture, virtual walking tours of neighbourhoods referenced in the archival materials); curriculum resources for schoolteachers; and a virtual Cape Breton world through which users, after creating their own personal avatar, can navigate and engage with audio/video materials related to important locations within the region.

The project collaborators are too numerous to be even briefly introduced here. Yet it should be noted that the relationships established through the Ukrainian dance exhibit in 2009 grew rapidly in the following years to include an increasing number of people affiliated with communities of not only Ukrainian but also other Eastern and Central European origin, along with heritage institutions and galleries, research centers, and university departments and offices in Cape Breton and other regions of Canada and the United States. As for the former, more often than not they joined the project primarily in order to facilitate a longer life of their community traditions, while cultural and academic institutions, scholars and professionals have been primarily interested in an expanded scope and potential uses of the research materials, and the exploration of how interactive multimedia may meet educational and research goals.<sup>16</sup> In addition, numerous undergraduate and graduate students have been trained through the project, and community-based researchers have been employed or at times have volunteered their expertise in different areas including (but not limited to) historical content, ethnographic and archival research, audio/video documentation, exhibit creation, language and translation, community-engagement process, organization of outreach, virtual exhibit and database development, copyright and permissions, coding and graphics design.

As we developed the web portal, we encountered problems familiar to any ethnomusicologist, many of which pertain to issues of representation. All music researchers are aware of the challenge of representing music. Transcriptions of sound are only and always partial, as are written, ethnographic representations of musicking and related experiences. For an increasing number of researchers, multimedia provides an attractive means of both conducting and representing research in productive ways. Multimedia tools and platforms enable new and innovative ways of representing and sharing our research — often with much

<sup>16</sup> Our formal partner institutions and individuals are affiliated with Cape Breton University (folklorist Richard MacKinnon and the Centre for Cape Breton Studies), University of Alberta (ethnomusicologist Michael Frishkopf, Wirth Centre for Austrian and Central European Studies, FolkwaysAlive!, and Kule Centre for Ukrainian and Canadian Folklore), Concordia University (Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling), University of Washington (Canadian Studies Centre at the Jackson School for International Studies), and University of Aizu, Japan. Other institutions, especially the Beaton Institute and Archives at Cape Breton University, although not formal partners, have also provided expert consultation, and created a »Projects Page« that links the diversitycapebreton.ca web portal to the Beaton collections.

wider, broader and/or more distant audiences than in the past — as well as safeguarding and storing research materials. These tools and platforms also provide researchers with additional methods for remotely carrying out research. However, they are limited by their programming. Creating new programming takes many hours of very specialized work to which few humanities and social sciences researchers have access, except at great cost — although that is beginning to change with the burgeoning of digital humanities.<sup>17</sup> Our diversitycapebreton.ca team was fortunate to be able to overcome some of these hurdles since our team included colleagues from multimedia studies whose research focuses on the development of new media, including the creation of virtual worlds.

Other challenges related to multimedia technologies arose. For example, after our project funding had been awarded it became clear that policy regulations prohibited Cape Breton University from supporting anything except Windows environments, while most cutting-edge digital humanities projects are open-source and not operated in proprietary environments. Furthermore, the university could not provide support for web-based research in light of its very limited technology staff and insufficient server space (an institutional and budgetary challenge that cannot be solved quickly). Who would host and maintain the portal? After several months, we found partners in the Atlantic arm of Compute Canada, ACENET, and the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). For the immediate short term and at a financial cost, UPEI — and creators of the Islandora platform on which the web portal has been built — will support the portal. It will later be migrated to Compute Canada's new equipment when it comes online within the year. The virtual world component of the portal, however, will be hosted and maintained

<sup>17</sup> Digital humanities is a fast-growing field, integrating perspectives from across disciplinary boundaries, bringing together researchers whose work is moving the possibilities for ethnomusicology and related fields forward in exciting ways. Some examples most relevant to the current study include Michael BUSSIÈRE: Performance Space Meets Cyberspace: Seeking the Creative Idiom and Technical Model for Live Music on Broadband, *Leonardo Music Journal*, 13 (2003) December, 73-74; Sarah COOK, Beryl GRAHAM, Verina GFADER and Axel LAPP (eds): *A Brief History of Curating New Media Art: Conversations with Curators*, The Breen Box, Berlin 2010; Ollivier DYENS: The Emotion of Cyberspace: Art and Cyber-Ecology, *Leonardo*, 27 (1994) 4, 327-333; Barbara Rose LANGE: Hypermedia and Ethnomusicology, *Ethnomusicology*, 45 (2001) 1, 132-149; Rasika RANAWEERA, Michael FRISHKOPF and Michael COHEN: Folkways in Wonderland: A Cyberworld Laboratory for Ethnomusicology, in: *2011 International Conference on Cyberworlds*, IEEE 2011, 106-112; Robin RIDINGTON, Jillian RIDINGTON, Patrick MOORE, Kate HENNESSY and Amber RIDINGTON: Ethnopoetic Translation in Relation to Audio, Video, and New Media Representations, in: Brian SWANN (ed.): *Born in the Blood: On Native American Translation*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 2011, 211-241; Anthony SEEGER: Traditional Music Ownership in a Commodified World, in: Simon FRITH and Lee MARSHALL (eds.): *Music and Copyright*, Routledge, London 2004, 157-170; Ramesh SRINIVASAN, and Jeffrey HUANG: Fluid Ontologies for Digital Museums, *International Journal on Digital Libraries*, 5 (2005) 3, 193-204; Rebecca STEWART, Mark LEVY and Mark SANDLER: 3D Interactive Environment for Music Collection Navigation, in: *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Digital Audio Effects (DAFx-08)*, 2008, [http://legacy.spa.aalto.fi/dafx08/papers/dafx08\\_03.pdf](http://legacy.spa.aalto.fi/dafx08/papers/dafx08_03.pdf) (accessed 1 October 2015); Timothy D. TAYLOR: *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology, and Culture*, Routledge, New York 2001; Sally TRELOYN, and Andrea EMBERLY: Sustaining Traditions: Ethnomusicological Collections, Access and Sustainability in Australia, *Musicology Australia*, 35 (2013) 2, 159-177.



by its creators in Japan, our partners at the University of Aizu. This discussion of basic infrastructural and budgetary challenges only provides the briefest of summaries relating to the numerous technical and logistical challenges we encountered to ensure we secured our aims.

After working through several technical and capacity challenges to allow for the development of basic infrastructure of the site, other issues became apparent. Perhaps most glaringly, the ways in which data is stored and organized within the site required us to upload items into the repository according to ethnocultural identifiers. Rather than demonstrating the ways in which these categories are permeable, mutable, pliable, intertwined and overlapping, the system seems to reify ethnocultural identities. One might suggest that this may be a problem of time and that, if we either had more time (and presumably more money to support that development time), or had started other processes earlier in the funding envelope, we would be able to solve this problem.

The problem is larger than that, however, and less concrete. First, community members themselves cherish their heritage, and the people we interviewed typically strongly identify with a single ethnocultural community though, in cases where a joint ancestry exists, it is often celebrated. These ethnocultural identities are thus community-driven. Further, while all of us — scholars and community members alike — recognize and value the connections between and across (and even without regard to) ethnocultural community group identities, given the amount and types of content, and the ways in which the platform must group content, it remains to be seen how we might manage the content in a way that does not reify these identities.

One way in which we have worked to celebrate the connectedness and overlap in cultural practices and identities is through the logo. In light of her existing relationship with local communities and her experience working with materials in Slavic languages, we contracted Darene Yavorsky, a professional designer, to create the portal's logo and design elements. She knew from prior experience that this process should be collaborative and that feedback from the diverse communities would need to be integrated. I asked her to create a draft of a logo that I could take to the various ethnocultural participants — mostly community members in this case — for feedback. She based her draft on some embroidered textiles, and a photo of the Cape Breton shore. A musical note indicated the central importance of music in various dimensions of cultural expression and community life in the context of our study, as well as the lens of ethnomusicology at the root of this research. All of these were elements found among the materials we had gathered through research.


I took the draft to the members of the communities with whom we had been developing working relationships. I also showed it to the research assistants, each of whom had spent time interviewing community members and reviewing archival materials. After synthesizing their feedback, we settled on a logo and design elements. A red poppy is an important symbol for both Polish and Ukrainian

communities, as is wheat. An olive branch is of significance for Jews, as well as those of Croatian descent, who often spoke of the importance of olive oil in traditional cuisine. The purple iris, which grows wild in Cape Breton, is also the national flower of Croatia. The photo of Cape Breton's iconic shores and the silhouette of the steel plant and coal mine are symbolic of island-specific experiences that are common to all these groups.

This logo, combined with the web portal's other creative design elements, begins to express some of the interconnectedness of ethnocultural communities concerned, though we may have been less successful in that regard with the organization of data in the portal's repository. The beautiful elements, including the logo's rich and colourful qualities, are mainly celebratory and could be understood as overly-simplistic (as any metonym or symbol can be). However, other elements, such as the steel plant and coalmine, are reminiscent of hardship and toil as much as they are of (historical) employment opportunities in Cape Breton. Community members have articulated their mixed feelings about the industries of Cape Breton. These industries provided the means of making a living in a new land among other immigrants and were the reason their ancestors crossed the ocean; however, histories of labour unrest, inequality, eventual decline and depression are tied up in these same industries. All aspects of the portal, including the logo, inspire reflection about the complicated histories and experiences of Cape Bretoners (see image of logo below, used with permission).

I suspect it will be through other levels of representation that we will eventually achieve drawing attention to the connections and overlap between ethnocultural communities, such as through exhibits and other options for displaying/presenting the materials that are in our repository. In discussion with community members, we draw attention to this challenge and, in this way, have started a dialogue about intercultural connections, already celebrated by the communities themselves. As we move forward in this project — keeping in mind that the portal is a living and growing resource — I look forward to seeing how, together with the communities, we find ways to address this current shortcoming of the portal.

Individuals who do not live in Cape Breton but who have connections to the island — who have up to now not been able to participate in the various fieldwork and development processes of the web portal — have the potential to and have already begun to offer more material, including interviews, to enrich the repository. We have already been receiving enthusiastic feedback from some of these individuals who have stumbled upon the beta version of the portal while surfing the internet. Our team of scholars has also articulated and begun to seek funding for new research projects, to address questions and challenges that arose in the context of the current project. For instance, having observed the possibilities for public outreach and education in the initial phase of the web portal, as well as curriculum applications in schools, several other immigrant and heritage communities, teachers and school boards are all eager to create repositories and



The 2015 launch of this web portal begins with Eastern and Central Europeans who came ashore, joining indigenous groups and other immigrants.

Industry on the island also drew peoples of African descent; from the British Isles, France and Italy, still others from Western Europe and the Middle East who enriched the region with their own practises and special cultural gifts.

Cape Breton's complete story has yet to be told! Future phases of this web portal will further explore its rich diversity.

A word about the logo from The Word & Image Studio • [www.wordandimage.ca](http://www.wordandimage.ca)

**OLIVE SAPPLINGS:**  
Blessed of the Jewish people; also, olive oil production in Croatia dates back to ancient times

**POPPY & WHEAT:**  
Potent symbols of the old country for Ukrainians and Poles

**THE IRIS:**  
National flower of Croatia; also found growing wild in Cape Breton

**STEEL PLANT**      **COAL MINES**

**Industrial Cape Breton:**  
A faithful rendering of Sydney steel plant & Glace Bay coal mine: the silhouette at left is borrowed from the cover art of John Huk's book, *Strangers in the Land: The Ukrainian Presence in Cape Breton*, first ed. 1986, 25th anniversary reprinting 2011.

Newly ashore and eager to thrive with new opportunities

**MUSICAL NOTE:**  
The distillation of traditional ethnic arts and culture, representing heart, soul and higher achievement, lifting body, mind and spirit above daily concerns

iversitycapebreton.ca

Logo of the web portal diversitycapebreton. ca, and its explanation (used with permission)

resources related to a greater diversity of Cape Breton's ethnocultural communities. In light of the interest from the public and scholars alike, I am hopeful that our team will be able to access resources to support continued field research and development of the web portal.

A prototype of the portal as a whole was also shared with ethnomusicologists and heritage professionals at a digital humanities workshop and conference in June 2015. Their feedback included comments on metadata, content, design and layout, as well as conceptual matters. Let me to mention just a few. As for the metadata, although our team originally thought it would be useful to include a great amount of detail and align our metadata template with professional disciplinary standards (such as the Dublin Core, typically used by folklorists), it

appeared that such a template was difficult for anyone other than professional archivists to use. Thus, we have requested a simplified one, though this problem may not be resolved quickly. Regarding content, an even greater ratio of images to text was desired by the prototype users. As well, more contextual information regarding specific ethnocultural communities was requested, even though a concern was expressed (in line with my own) that this might result with even greater reification of distinctiveness of cultural groups, contrary to our hope to demonstrate their overlap, mutability and interconnectedness. Concerning conceptual issues, the most problematic appeared to be the concept of »diversity«. For some, »diversity« refers specifically to LGBT activism, and therefore the ethnocultural diversity that is at the root of [diversitycapebreton.ca](http://diversitycapebreton.ca) might not be what some online users expect to find. Others pointed out that while the content on the portal begins to address a greater diversity of cultural groups on the island, numerous groups are not yet represented there. For this reason, we revised the language on the site to indicate more clearly that emphasis put on Eastern and Central European immigrant groups and their descendants (and we name them) refers only to the first phase of the project, while also noting that we are pursuing funding to support research for and the development of resources to address a much greater diversity.

Following the revisions based on these initial feedback sessions, the in-community launch of the portal was held in August 2015. We have begun to solicit feedback from users belonging to communities represented by the portal through workshops held subsequently to the launch event. We are currently scheduling a series of consultations with key research participants, educational professionals (teachers and school boards) and other community advisors to ensure that the [diversitycapebreton.ca](http://diversitycapebreton.ca) portal will meet users' needs and interests as we continue to develop and roll out new resources through the portal in the months (and years) ahead.

Even now, as the portal is in its early stages, benefits of this project have emerged. These include the training of students and the development of capacities in the community at large. More than a dozen student positions at different levels have been created, providing opportunities to participate in new research and to be involved in its presentation through research talks and conferences, as well as through the development of web-based resources. Through their participation in the project, student and non-student community-based research assistants learned ethnographic techniques, including archival research and collection procedures, digitization and other materials processing, ethnographic interview skills, digital video and audio recording and production, the creation of radio journalistic pieces (by a highly-regarded CBC producer) and other multimedia resources (well beyond websites). Graduate students have been involved in project management, research, digitization, content creation, programming and media-specific tasks. The research assistants liaised with community members, faculty researchers and consultants,

providing them opportunities to work with the highest level of researchers and put into practice management and interpersonal skills that will be invaluable to the management of their own research projects.

The project's benefits extend well beyond the immediate development team, of course. In light of the community-based nature of our research, our priorities are to facilitate the use of the portal by the communities who have contributed to its development, and who continue to do so. As educators and researchers interested in having the research be of use to wider communities, we are also focusing on the continued development of educational and curricular resources. This research has helped to expand the heritage sector's service base, and to improve online heritage and educational resources, encouraging the use of local archive holdings by wider groups, and countering outdated perceptions that Cape Bretoners are homogeneous.

One example of an expanded representation of Cape Breton's heritage beyond our own portal is with the Beaton Institute. The Beaton Institute is the official archive of Cape Breton University, and a heritage archive that preserves materials related to the culture and history of Cape Breton. The Beaton Institute has drawn on the collections brought in through research that I began in 2008 to create new resources, including an Eastern and Central European Holdings project page. This page showcases specific communities and cultures of Cape Breton and is accessible through the [diversitycapebreton.ca](http://diversitycapebreton.ca) portal as well as through the Beaton Institute's own website.

Moreover, the portal's various components are already engaging wide audiences, both locally and further afield: analytics of the portal showed in the first days after the official launch that it was accessed by Cape Bretoners, other Canadians and audiences overseas. Users have begun to write to us, pleased to see a portrayal of a more complex Cape Breton cultural landscape and a very public recognition of a greater diversity of ethnocultural groups than has typically been presented. Through the liberal use of accompanying texts and images, including 3D images of material culture, digital video and audio clips of ethnographic interviews, and music and dance performances, we are helping a wide variety of audiences to learn about and gain experience with the island's communities, events and practices of the past and of today, thereby emphasizing the dynamic and living nature of tradition.

We vividly represent materials from a relatively remote location, now accessible almost anywhere in the world via the internet. Additionally, we are in the process of developing an interactive forum to provide a platform for a discussion of social challenges among subscribers (and potentially wider publics, depending on decision-making and consultations with stakeholders), and for continued dialogue between communities and researchers. We have also created graphically engaging web resources, including a cyberworld, using new technologies, design tools and other web-based resources.

### *Reflecting on a Collaborative and Dialogic Process*

Central to the web portal project is collaborative process of its evolvement. Of central importance to the core team is a value in understanding of diverse community members' lives, experiences, knowledge, memories and practices; this marks our endeavor from the beginnings of research, through various stages of dissemination, and in continuing relationships afterward. The aims, processes and deliverables of the web portal project were defined and created collaboratively by scholars, community leaders and members, directors and staff of museums and archives, artists, as well as supervisors and heads of university offices. Such an approach was established from the earliest stages of outreach to initiate relationships with the communities, and endures in the current project phase. A praxis-based collaborative approach has been helpful to those of us conducting »ethnography of the proximate«<sup>18</sup> with those among whom we live. We are concerned with reciprocity,<sup>19</sup> we are eager to find ways to engage in enriched dialogue with our research participants (often in roles as co-researchers), and we value opportunities to contribute meaningfully to our communities.<sup>20</sup>

Designed to meet both community-defined needs and institutional academic goals, the web portal project's aims enable comprehension of history, communities and cultural practices from the 'inside out': from the vantage points of those who live and make them, and make them meaningful.<sup>21</sup> The various collective outputs of the project meet the interests of different audiences and offices: the funders (SSHRC; and other contributors such as the Wirth Institute who builds on relationships with overseas institutions by sponsoring emerging researchers to come to Canada, and the Shevchenko Foundation which supports work that addresses Ukrainian history and culture in Canada); my supervisors and peers in academia (academic outputs demonstrate that funding is being put to good use and that our offices are being productive); the university as an institution (in this instance, particularly by building and maintaining relationships with local communities); and the communities themselves (whose diverse members have many interests). As an ethnographer, I am the learner and I ask the community members, who are the experts on their culture and histories, what is important to them about their histories and experiences, their culture and practices? What do

<sup>18</sup> Jasna ČAPO ŽMEGAČ, Valentina GULIN ZRNIĆ and Goran Pavel ŠANTEK: Ethnology of the Proximate: The Poetics and Politics of Contemporary Fieldwork, in: Jasna ČAPO ŽMEGAČ et al. (eds.): *Etnologija bliskoga: Poetika i politika suvremenih terenskih istraživanja*, Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Zagreb 2010, 261-310.

<sup>19</sup> Jeff Todd TITON: *Curating Culture, Sustaining Music*.

<sup>20</sup> See Naila CERIBAŠIĆ: Statement to Round Table: Dialogical Research Practices in Europe: Approaches and Implications; presentation at the *41st World Conference of the International Council for Traditional Music*, St. John's (Canada), July 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Henry GREENSPAN: *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History*, Praeger, Westport 1998; Joe LAMBERT: *The Digital Storytelling Cookbook*, Center for Digital Storytelling, Berkeley 2007.

they most value, why and how? What questions should I be asking? What is important for me to know? And what is important for me to do?

The collaborative process also provides an opportunity to rethink the research process, where communities are both partners in research and the focus of study; a »shared authority« is inherent in definitions of research and in the resulting representations of history and experience.<sup>22</sup> One key example is with the republication of the previously mentioned book, written by John Huk. For this project, I served as guest managing editor. From the outset, Huk and I agreed that our aim was to republish the book and make it available and useful to wider audiences, particularly academic audiences who had expressed great interest in learning about local Ukrainian communities. After having worked with Huk to compile updated information that would be presented in appendices, I set about writing my introduction. I hoped to provide a scholarly context for the book and the historical information it contained, to introduce and make a case for it to a scholarly audience. I also needed, as a postdoctoral research fellow at that time, to produce research of a quality that stood up to peer-review. For this reason, the first draft of my introduction included footnotes to explicate certain points and make connections with other scholarly literature. I sent it to Huk for review, as we had agreed I should do. A short time later, I heard from my Dean that Huk had met with him at the university; unfortunately, Huk was very upset about the introduction I had drafted. Though laudatory in many regards — indeed, I worked to impress upon scholars the great value and urgency of Huk's work — Huk felt his work would pale in comparison if we printed such a thoroughly referenced piece of writing next to his text, which does not contain footnotes and has few references to secondary sources (because much of the book is based on primary sources collected by Huk).

Though I have always been impressed by the meticulous and highly valuable work that Huk conducted in the production of his book, it was imperative to respect his feelings about this issue. Nevertheless, my dilemma was that I also wanted to ensure that the work would be given its due by scholars. We reasoned that, because of the innovative and hybrid nature of the publication, scholars would readily see the value based on the introduction revised to a form without footnotes.<sup>23</sup> I would in any case be writing different scholarly material about Ukrainian communities (currently in process), supported by the Dean who offered some financial assistance for this. Moreover, I was continuing to disseminate the knowledge learned through the research in other ways, including a variety of academic formats. Thus, we

<sup>22</sup> Michael FRISCH: *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1990; Katherine T. CORBETT, and Howard S. MILLER: A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry, *The Public Historian*, 28 (2006) 1, 15-38; Steven HIGH: Sharing Authority: An Introduction, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 43 (2009) 1, 12-34.

<sup>23</sup> See John HUK: *Strangers in the Land: The Ukrainian Presence in Cape Breton*, Centre for Cape Breton Studies, Cape Breton University Press, Sydney (NS) 2011. [with new introduction by Marcia Ostashevski].

were able to maintain good relations and respectfulness as a primary value at the core of this project, something that was possible due to the strong relationships established between Huk, me and all other collaborators, which carried our team, as a whole, through challenges such as this one. In this, we shared authority in decision-making about how the research would be (re)presented. Returning to the web portal and its community-engaged, praxis-based work, we can use the Huk publication as a prime example of how tensions and contradictions can be productive.

Not only is the web portal community-engaged and praxis-based, but its process and deliverables are also dialogic: they integrate a variety of materials, perspectives and voices to facilitate respectful and productive dialogue, and they present the material in ways that are evocative of related histories and experiences. From the outset, I have been consulting with community members to ask about how the research can serve community needs. The diverse community members articulated many different interests and were invested in the project for a variety of reasons. People of the various ethnocultural communities involved in the project generally value publications such as the Huk book, even if some might prefer to access materials in different formats, based on their own habits, interests and needs (for example, schoolteachers might more readily access online materials). Scholars seek also material in other forms, and the local archive was interested in continuing to build its collection, particularly with a greater diversity of Cape Breton's ethnocultural communities. Further, Huk's book, while it is an extraordinary feat and labour of love by a son of the community, is understood locally to be very much from the author's perspective. As it was the only publication focusing on Cape Bretoners of Ukrainian descent, many community members have remarked on the omission of myriad stories and voices. Multiple project outputs, different forms through which different kinds of information can be shared, help to facilitate the telling of stories about experiences, help to include more diverse representation of events and histories and assist in integrating more voices. This is indeed literally the case with the portal, where many different voices can be heard in audio and video recordings. Further, while some people are more interested in reading a book, others are more likely to go online to learn and engage with research materials. Project outcomes like concerts, dance workshops, book launches and exhibit openings engaged new audiences (as musicians, dancers and concertgoers, as exhibit committees and technicians) in celebratory and social events. They provided opportunities for us to acknowledge the efforts of others and to jointly celebrate our accomplishments along the way, an especially important occurrence when larger outcomes are a long time coming.

Feedback from across diverse sectors shows that this research has already had tangible positive outcomes: university students, faculty researchers and administrators, professional contractors and consultants, heritage institutions, community organizations and individuals have found it to be a nexus of research, creative work and public engagement, facilitated through new media-rich



ethnography, beyond (while still including) textual representations and ethnographies that are the common standard in ethnomusicology. As Tom Urbaniak, a scholar who works with Polish community organizations on behalf of the project team, has noted: already the material created through the portal project has shown itself to be invaluable. For example, at the launch of the portal in August 2015, Urbaniak drew the audiences' attention to the virtual tours and detailed photo documentation of the original St. Mary's Polish church in Whitney Pier, which burned to the ground in the fall of 2014. The virtual tour and photos have been a constant resource for the architect and designers of the new church.

All of us who have contributed to the project have invested ourselves in different ways in this research. The collaborative process was established as a means of encouraging the investment of many different people in abundant ways. If it is to be sustainable, we will need to continue to find this work to be of both personal and professional significance. It is remarkable the extent to which, over several years, this research has involved and been supported by so many people with different interests and from diverse backgrounds, all of whom have contributed various complementary resources. The question of sustainability is increasingly important for scholars and heritage institutions, and it will be interesting to see how, working together, we manage this challenge for the [diversitycapebreton.ca](http://diversitycapebreton.ca) portal.

### *Conclusion*

Community members and heritage institutions alike have expressed grave concern that this is a crucial time for ethnocultural communities in Cape Breton: many descendants of Eastern and Central European immigrants have moved off the island to find work (typical of the general Cape Breton population), few descendants under the age of forty are aware of much community history, and even fewer speak their language of heritage or regularly participate in community activities. Only a few, and most of them are elders, are able to participate in community music practices, since younger people are mostly unfamiliar with the practices. Yet, over the past five years, our collaborative research has inspired the regular involvement of youth and young adults (who had not been involved in the community since early childhood) to work with elders toward collectively defined goals and building for their future. Integrating Eastern and Central European history and culture into interactive multimedia and educational contexts, the various research outcomes including the [diversitycapebreton.ca](http://diversitycapebreton.ca) web portal provides resources for Cape Bretoners and others to learn about the histories of these communities, their significance within Canada, and not only to share cultural practices (including language) but to underline the importance of keeping them alive as well. This web portal project, working across disciplines and sectors, involving students, community members, scholars and a variety of institutions,

provides local groups and individuals with new tools and abilities to work toward a sustainable future for their communities and cultures, and it enables others to do similar work.

At the same time, the diversitycapebreton.ca web portal project provides innovative perspectives, encouraging a redefinition of possibilities for research processes and production. It offers a means, beyond purely textual representation, for the content of ethnomusicological research. It provides opportunities to apply our research in ways that benefit the communities with whom we conduct research. It also encourages an alliance of art and scholarship and provides for new technological applications, particularly as it concerns sharing documentation, archiving and safeguarding material, cultural artifacts, oral histories and practices. Finally, it makes provision for the development of new technological opportunities. This work values research participants and communities in both teaching and learning, in constructing and sharing information, and in disseminating knowledge. It aims to be a valuable public resource about ethnocultural groups that have been active in Cape Breton since the late 1800s, yet have gone largely unacknowledged until now. Shedding new light on what it means to do research in Atlantic Canada, this project promotes deeper understandings of cultural identities; as such, it resonates beyond its national context.

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#### Sažetak

#### ISTRAŽIVANJE UZ ANGAŽMAN ZAJEDNICE I ZA ZAJEDNICU TE NJEGOVI ISHODI: PROJEKT MREŽNOG PORTALA U CAPE BRETONU, NOVA SCOTIA, KANADA

Autorica je u Cape Bretonu (Nova Scotia, Kanada) inicirala digitalni multimedijalni istraživački projekt, kojemu je glavna sastavnica mrežni portal *diversitycapebreton.ca*. Kontinuirano se razvija u tijesnoj suradnji sa samim zajednicama o kojima je riječ — onima podrijetlom iz istočne i srednje Europe, a obuhvaća digitalni repozitorij, virtualno uključivanje u njihove svjetove i druge interaktivne edukativne sadržaje. Namjera mu je nadoknaditi manjak u postojećim interpretacijama baštine Cape Bretona, usredotočenima na škotske i akademske karakteristike, predočujući raznolikost etnokulturnog profila ovoga otoka. Korisnici portala mogu pristupiti arhivskom gradivu kao što su fotografije, raznovrsni dokumenti te zvučni i video zapisi. Dostupni su i mnogobrojni interaktivni

sadržaji, uključujući prethodno oblikovane izložbe (npr. zbirke usredotočene na glazbu, na povijest zajednica, pa su tu virtualni obilasci izložbenih postava, panoramski obilasci arhitektonske baštine, virtualne šetnje po četvrtima spomenutima u arhivskoj građi), nastavne materijale namijenjene učiteljima i virtualni svijet Cape Bretona po kojem se korisnici, nakon što stvore vlastiti lik, mogu kretati i doći u doticaj sa zvučnom i video građom vezanom uz važne lokacije u regiji. Portal je zamišljen kao široko dostupan živi repozitorij s rastućim fondom građe, što će omogućiti njezinu dugoročnu zaštitu, istraživanje i daljnje osnaživanje dijaloga i razmjene među svim dionicima i drugim zainteresiranim stranama. Takvo multimedijalno istraživanje posjeduje znatan potencijal da potpomogne angažman zajednica jer im pristupa na razumljiv način, povezujući privatnu, obrazovnu i baštinsku sferu. Javlja se međutim i izazovi istraživanja provedenog uz angažman zajednice i za nju, napose kad istraživač radi s različitim zajednicama i živi među njima. Nadalje, ograničene mogućnosti programiranja te različita infrastrukturna i financijska ograničenja mogu utjecati i na multimedijalne alate. No oni, s druge strane, omogućuju nove i inovativne načine predstavljanja i dijeljena rezultata istraživanja povrh pukog tekstualnog predstavljanja, pohranu i očuvanje prikupljene građe te primjenu istraživanja na dobrobit istraživanih zajednica. Usto takvi alati potiču povezivanje umjetnosti i znanosti te nove tehnološke primjene. Projekt o kojemu je riječ visoko vrednuje sve sudjelujuće pojedince i zajednice, stavljajući naglasak na učenje u oba smjera, izgradnju i dijeljenje informacija te širenje znanja. Predstavlja vrijedan javni izvor o etnokulturnim skupinama koje su u Cape Bretonu aktivne od potkraj 19. stoljeća, no do danas su ostale mahom nevidljive. Osvjetljavajući iz novog ugla što to znači istraživati na atlantskoj obali Kanade, projekt promiče dublje razumijevanje kulturnih identiteta, te time odjekuje i povrh svog nacionalnog konteksta.

