



Global Mural, Arts & Cultural Tourism Association

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Reflections on the Organisation of a Global Biennial Conference for the GMACTA

This paper has been prepared *before* the Global Conference that will take place in Prestonpans from August 14th/ 18th 2006. It sets down the advices received and the design created for that Conference as a reference point for its evaluation by the Prestoungrange Arts Festival itself [as host] but also by those attending.

Background: Prestoungrange Arts Festival [PAF] sought and won the Association's nomination at Moosejaw in 2002 – the first occasion on which the Association had selected a host fully 4 years ahead. Although such a long term perspective has been queried since that time [and it was continued with the selection of Sheffield Tasmania 2008 at Ely Nevada in 2004], it suited PAF brilliantly.

- It enabled us to publish a Manifesto of what we were determined to achieve 'by the date' and to focus our resources over 48 months on getting there i.e. we gave ourselves a declared deadline to meet; and
- It enabled us to visit numerous murals events in North America and Australasia to meet the potential participants and to learn what we could hope to achieve.

Organising the first Global Conference outside North America, where almost all the members are to be found, was considered by many to be brave if not foolhardy. Whilst the Association's members do indeed boast some fulltime salaried officers of their city or town, the vast majority are 'volunteers' and to persuade them to travel to Scotland for the conference would require a considerable expense. Frankly it could only really make sense as part of a longer 'vacation'.

It is our submission that Sheffield Tasmania will face a similarly challenging task in March 2008 to motivate 'volunteers' to make their way to Australia, and that once again 'vacation planning' is likely to be the most effective way to achieve substantial attendances.

Selling Scotland as well as Murals – and well in advance: We were advised at selection time in 2002 that Scotland had not only its own diaspora across North America and Australasia, but it had its own fascination from *Braveheart*, whisky and golf. Accordingly the programme presented created our own Golf Competition up front, a visit to our own Lowland Distillery and to the Edinburgh tattoo. We also ensured that our Conference coincided with the world's largest Arts Festival, the Edinburgh Arts Festival taking place just 10 miles west, with over 500,000 visitors each year.

And our Global Conference programme in its broad outline was comprehensively ready at Ely 2004 for presentation and promotion from then .

[Accommodation was our Achilles heel at all times since by synchronising with the Edinburgh Arts Festival's 500,000 visitors made accommodation hard to find.]

Lessons we felt we learnt in the build up to 2006: As has already been stated, we determined to visit as many 'other town's events' as possible and as many 'other towns per se' as possible. And fortunately the work cycle of the senior team made that possible. After Moosejaw, symposia and conferences in Lindsay, Ely, Bowen, Bishop were visited and contributions given; and a further 20 murals and arts towns in North America, Australasia and Europe visited.

A. The most significant lesson we felt we learned was that on most occasions, whilst the international visitors worked and talked with one another, **the local town itself was slow and sometimes clearly unable to mobilise or interest its 'own' arts community at large.** On some occasions this was due to rivalries but more often it seemed to be due to local work routines. In such circumstances only evening interaction seemed feasible.

We wanted to design a Conference where as many of the local community interacted with as many of the visitors as possible. This we have striven to do [i] by arranging a parallel/overlapping Summer School with the leading visitors offering Master Classes and an exhibition at the end; [ii] by asking local arts class members to 'host' a visiting town group; [iii] by making the Conference a highly visible event via totem pole carving, mural-in-a-day and evening social entertainments; and [iv] by convening a Civic Reception and Potlatch with all committed parties invited.

B. The second area we wished to address carefully was **the time allocated for each participating town to share its experiences one with another,** by design not only by informal interaction away from the sessions. We had found as we travelled the towns and cities of the Association an incredible richness and variety of ways they addressed the common challenge we all faced. From one end of the scale is Foxton with its 17th Century Dutch windmill in New Zealand. At the other is a Canadian town with virtually a single muralist painting dozens of murals in the space of 3 years or so. In between is every variety from a local Council initiative to hide dereliction or beautify public lavatories, through a local do-it-yourself arts initiative, to world class trompe l'oeil by artists parachuted into town to create the most exquisite work.

C. Thirdly, as we made the series of global visits, the discussion frequently turned to the topic of: **What Comes After Murals?** From Moosejaw onwards the tale was always the same – "it all started with the murals, but after that came" Moosejaw's Spa and Casino; Foxton's windmill; Prestoungrange's Gothenburg; Sheffield's Annual Murals Fest; Chemainus' Dinner Theatre and Best Western Suites; Ely's Labyrinth, cinema and JC Penny store. The list goes on and each next step is seemingly wholly 'situation specific' in the way murals were not. We wanted to seek to understand the answers emerging and seek what generalisations might be found.

D. Fourthly, each and every town, whilst seeking tips and listening carefully to the founding father[s], did little **to study and evaluate in a powerful way the outcomes achieved and the most effective models of organisation to sustain momentum.** Yet a vast body of knowledge exists in the literature on these matters and especially on the regenerative needs of voluntary organisations. Of course teams and societies have life

cycles, but wise leaders can and should manager them as wise corporate leaders do. Two most powerful vehicles have emerged to complement the work of the Global Association in Canadian Mural Routes and California's CalPAMs. Whilst they could be seen by some as a threat to the global sharing, the view we took from Scotland was that they strengthened it as long as the conferences held avoided one another. We accordingly wanted airtime for both these allies and we commissioned a UK University study of evaluation techniques for the arts activities we are all engaged upon, to be tabled and discussed. [And we undertook and published a major literature review.]

E. Fifthly we wanted to **design a conferential process that made the most of the activities provided.** Bishop had shown the strength of taking the 'traditional' talk about paint out on to the streets of the town to 'look' at the challenges and diagnose the solutions. We resolved to take the murals tour as practised in Bowen and Sheffield and make a mural or two come alive with re-enactments as we had seen in Ely.

We wanted to make the most of the finale of the Mural-in-a-Day sequence which we had seen on occasion not to be well orchestrated; and we wanted with the help of the global leaders in this field, to stay with our own tradition of using local artists for all the works we attempt. [We had been greatly impressed with Sheffield's Murals Fest concept, but knowing they would be presenting that in 2008 we deliberately did not go there.]

F. Finally, we **wanted to acknowledge just how much we owed to Chemainus** and its originating leader Dr Karl Schutz, by creating an historical record for our town that made use of the traditional art form of Chemainus that surprisingly the murals there had ignored. And the creation of the Prestoungrange Totem pole afforded the opportunity for all other towns present to bear witness and thank Chemainus for the example it had set. And it was a added bonus that such an approach brought Messages from the Premier and Arts and Tourism Minister of British Columbia to us all and reciprocity from Scotland's own. [This also seemed potentially to constitute the WOW factor so beloved of Karl!]

The Conference Team: Every member of the team destined to organise the Global Conference in Prestonpans visited at least two or more of the preceding conferences. The team is led by its Artistic Director Andrew Crummy, the Montjoye Adele Conn; the Baron Sergeand Sylvia Burgess; and Anne Taylor the CEO of the Prestoungrange Gothenburg, the Arts Hub. All have first hand knowledge and understanding of how the global community likes to interact, and the style of that interaction. My role is as Chairman of the PAF and the Conference organising team.

As observed earlier, the design was put in place by 2004 for Ely. This gave us a generous timescale over which to accomplish the readiness goals we set ourselves. The actions since then have been to follow the design through with some emendments but no wholesale changes. The most substantial addition has been the Summer School with its Master Classes.

It is indeed an organising 'team', with each area of promotion, creative design, artistic scheduling, catering, and eventing attended to by fully delegated and trusted colleagues in the team. We have been perhaps blessed by the professional volunteer skills and experience at our disposal across all key elements, but that is surely common to all towns and cities. So our particular blessing has been the 'distributed' work-style adopted.

What Comes After a Global Conference? It is a fascinating question to ponder, whether the energy summoned up by a volunteer organisation to create such a glorious event that lasts but a week, is the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end. Its a moment of local 'glory' that is hard to match and the chance to do it again in any volunteers' lifetime is small. Its a question we want to pose to Moosejaw, to Ely, to Chemainus, to Kati Kati, to 29 Palms, to Lindsay, to Bowen, to Bishop.

We already attempted to address it. We have a staked out horizon beyond 2006 with 2007 as the Year of Prestonpans Pottery and 2008 The Centenary Year of the Gothenburg itself. We are also determined to see a renaissance of interpretation and presentation of our famous local battle victory in 1745 for Bonnie Prince Charlie. And we certainly have more than a few murals yet to create – there are just 20 something in Prestonpans compared to pioneering towns' tallies of 50 + [even rising uniquely to 3000 in Philadelphia or LA]. And clearly The Gothenburg is a professionalized engine that can host and power arts initiatives along under its Gothenburg Principles – provided it takes great care to make sure the horse is at the front of the cart i.e. the enterprise does not forget to operate profitably to guarantee routinized future funding support.

Such questions and such energies as are unleashed will indeed have their own socioeconomic determinism for the community as unintended consequences. Is the town destined to become a tourist paradise for murals and theatre with a strong resident arts community such as Chemainus has, perhaps thereby becoming a more attractive Edinburgh commuter suburb; or are primary and secondary economic activities not dependent on the arts per se but arising because of greater community and individual self esteem to be encouraged?

How long can the focus on history-telling through accessible art be maintained with its involvement for all regardless before art-for-its-own-sake stakes its claim?

As Many Questions as Lessons Learnt: Indeed Yes. But we are firm students of the school that believes framing the relevant questions is more than halfway to wisdom. As we prepare to pass the Global Conference baton [banner] to Sheffield 2008, with Reflections such as these as our testimony as to what was attempted in Prestonpans, we move to our own post Global Conference penumbra where the quest for guidance from the aforementioned Chemainus, 29 Palms, Moosejaw and Ely in particular takes on saliency!