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Confederation Park, Centre Wellington, ON**

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Collage as a Participatory Tool in Public Space Design: Visualizing Cultural Value in Confederation Park, Centre Wellington, ON

By Melissa Lein^{}, Nadia Amoroso[±] & Robert Corry[°]*

This study explores collage as a participatory tool through a workshop centered on Confederation Park in Centre Wellington, Ontario. It investigates how collage can engage community members, represent cultural values, and inform inclusive design practices. Data was gathered using a collage-making workshop and post-workshop questionnaires with nine participants. The collage content and question responses indicate that collage can be a valuable tool for identifying and visually expressing cultural values, helping to surface the key activities, practices, elements, and themes that shape how people experience and relate to Confederation Park. The study highlights the value of participatory tools in public space design, demonstrating how collage can reveal cultural narratives and support more collaborative, inclusive community engagement. It contributes to a broader understanding of how visual qualitative methods can strengthen community involvement and shape public spaces that reflect shared cultural identities and value.

Introduction

Public parks and public spaces play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community and social connection. These spaces are meant to be shared and accessible to all individuals, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. However, park design, upkeep, and programming often do not fully support inclusivity. Due to limited budgets and competing priorities, many cities and municipalities neglect the development and maintenance of these vital spaces or fail to adapt them as their communities grow and change.

This study explores how cultural values can be included into both the design and visual representation of public spaces. When these values are acknowledged and integrated, public spaces can be redesigned or upgraded in more meaningful, affordable ways, ways that better reflect the identity and needs of the community. The recognition and valuation of landscapes are closely tied to aesthetic sensitivity, making visual representation a powerful tool—not only for planning but also for visualizing and expressing shared histories (Ganciu et al. 2024). Similarly, James Corner argues that if landscape architecture is less about showing static images of use and more about supporting and expanding how activities unfold over time, then new, more active forms of visual representation are needed. In this view, collage can become a tool shaping collaboration, process, and design (Corner 1999).

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Furthermore, this research looks at how collage, through a hands-on community workshop, can support inclusive design by surfacing cultural values and inviting community voices into the design process. While collage is often used in landscape architecture for idea development or design communication, it can also be a way to build deeper community engagement. When people are included in shaping the spaces they use, it strengthens their connection to place and promotes a sense of belonging. Collage, as a participatory tool, is a visual method that can allow people to express ideas through images, making the consultation process more inclusive and responsive. By prioritizing engagement, designers and municipalities can shape public spaces that are both practical and culturally significant.

Problem Definition

While public spaces should reflect the communities they serve, engagement efforts often miss capturing diverse cultural values and lived experiences. Confederation Park in Centre Wellington is a key example, as it faces pressure to preserve cultural significance while meeting the needs of a growing, diverse population. Proposed upgrades including interpretive signage, seating improvements, and safety enhancements, highlight the need to balance functionality, accessibility, and cultural value (Elora Fergus Today 2023).

This context offered an opportunity to explore collage as a participatory tool. Regular park visits provided firsthand insights into usage patterns, highlighting areas of high activity and neglect. Notes and photographs documented conditions and community behavior, revealing a preference for informal seating and suggesting gaps in current design. These observations underscored the importance of integrating both tangible and intangible cultural values into park planning through creative engagement methods.

Background & Context

Confederation Park is located at 295 Queen St. E. Fergus, Ontario. It is situated along the south banks of the Grand River and is accessible from major roads like Scotland Street, St. Andrew Street East, and St. David Street. More than a riverside green space, it functions as a living archive shaped by the surrounding community's social and cultural dynamics. Confederation Park serves a diverse range of nearby housing, including retirement apartments, condominiums, nursing homes, standard apartments, and single-family homes. Additionally, Confederation Park is rich in historical significance, reflecting the past settlement of Fergus and serving as a key benchmark in the community's identity and memory. The park not only contains historical landmarks but also serves as a venue for local gatherings, further reinforcing its role as a cultural and social hub in the heart of Fergus.

Research Approach

In this study, an exploration of a collage-making workshop was conducted to explore how collage can be used a participatory tool in public space design. The outcomes are interpreted qualitatively and quantitatively to discover cultural values associated with Confederation Park in Centre Wellington. The research is guided by the following question:

Can cultural values be identified and integrated into the visual representation of Confederation Park in Centre Wellington, Ontario, through collage?

Research Goals & Objectives

This study aims to explore the value of a collage-making workshop as a participatory tool in public space design, while also identifying and summarizing cultural value trends and anomalies associated with Confederation Park in Centre Wellington.

To achieve these research goals, the following three objectives were established:

1. Explore community perceptions and visual representations of cultural value through a collage-making workshop.
2. Analyze the collages using a two-step comparative matrix process to identify cultural trends and anomalies.
3. Assess questionnaire feedback data to evaluate the effectiveness of collage-making as a community participation tool.

Literature Review

The paper provides the research framework through a review of academic and grey literature, guided by three objectives: 1) understanding cultural heritage and public spaces as cultural landscapes, 2) examining the role of public participation in public space design, and 3) exploring visual methods in qualitative research to represent cultural values and support participation.

Cultural Identity and the Role of Public Spaces

Culture is commonly defined as a way of life shaped by shared beliefs, practices, and material traits. In landscape architecture, it serves as a dynamic lens through which people shape and experience outdoor spaces (Owens et al. 2023). Cultural heritage—both tangible (e.g., buildings, monuments) and intangible (e.g., music, rituals)—represents the legacies societies preserve and pass down. Tangible heritage includes iconic landmarks like the Taj Mahal and the Statue of Liberty, which serve as shared cultural symbols and sites of memory. However, smaller community spaces like parks and plazas also hold

deep local significance. These public spaces support everyday cultural expression, from festivals to storytelling, despite such intangible forms often being overlooked in heritage definitions (UNESCO n.d.).

Cultural Values

In historic preservation practice, “values” function like ethics, guiding the actions of a particular group or individual (Low et al. 2005). On the other hand, “cultural values,” are rooted in people's lived experiences, social identities, and cultural practices, shaping the ways communities connect to their environments and to one another (Low et al. 2005). Similarly, cultural values are not fixed—they are connected to objects, actions, and landscapes, but also shaped by the context, including the place, time, and people making the judgment (Low et al. 2005). These people might include landscape architects, planners, government agencies, or other groups who design and manage public spaces, each bringing their own perspectives that may or may not reflect the values of the communities they serve.

Cultural values are often communicated indirectly and are expressed through visual, symbolic, and material forms that convey deeper layers of meaning related to everyday life, collective memory, and identity. Further, interpretation plays a critical role (Low et al. 2005). Practitioners identify cultural values by paying attention to the symbols, practices and narratives that communities associate with particular places. Careful observation, dialogue with community members, and analysis of physical and social patterns help reveal the values embedded in the environment. The ways cultural values are read, understood, and represented can either reinforce or obscure the cultural narratives that shape people's experiences of space.

Cultural Landscapes

Cultural landscapes reflect the intersection of natural geography and human influence. Defined by Parks Canada as areas given meaning through human activity, they vary in significance depending on perspective, community, governmental, or global. UNESCO identifies three types: designed, evolved, and associative (UNESCO n.d.). Over time, cultural landscapes have shifted from traditional to post-modern forms, influenced by globalization, urban growth, and climate change (Antrop 2005). These transformations call for adaptable designs that respect both historical and present needs. Geography also shapes landscape identity, rural, coastal, or industrial settings foster distinct cultural expressions. In places like Centre Wellington, for example, agriculture and hydroelectric industries have defined the cultural landscape and strengthened local identity.

Public Parks as Cultural Landscapes

Focusing specifically on public parks, these designed spaces are more than just green areas, they represent intentional human intervention and serve as vital cultural centers where community identity, heritage, and values are both expressed and preserved. Like many cultural landscapes, public parks evolve over time, continually shaped by the presence and activities of people (Harvey 2001). In fact, rather than diminishing their significance, human interaction enhances both the natural and cultural value of these spaces, making them dynamic environments that reflect the collective memory and traditions of a community (Taylor & Lennon 2012).

Importantly, public parks are not passive landscapes. They are active, living spaces where social interactions, events, and everyday activities breathe life into the environment. Parks often host events and festivals that strengthen a community's culture and sense of identity. Despite this, research gaps remain in understanding how public parks can be designed to evolve alongside the changing cultural identities of communities over time. By accommodating both dynamic physical and cultural elements, public parks can become key sites for preserving heritage and encouraging social cohesion.

Since cultural landscapes are defined by both geographical context and human activity, it is crucial that public space design reflects the unique culture of the surrounding community and its users (UNESCO n.d.). According to Low et al. (2005), fostering cultural diversity should be a key objective in the design and maintenance of urban parks, as diverse spaces offer opportunities for various groups to connect, share experiences, and participate in cultural activities and practices (Low et al. 2005). However, there is also a need for further research into how specific design elements influence cultural engagement and interaction in public parks across various demographic groups. Well-designed public parks can bring people together and strengthen communities by welcoming and celebrating the different cultures and identities of the people who live there.

Community Participation and Public Space Design

Inclusive design depends on active community participation, especially in shaping the cultural and historical narratives represented in public spaces. Low et al. (2005) argue that promoting cultural diversity should be central to urban park design, while Ganciu et al. (2024) emphasize that landscapes emerge from the shared experiences and expressions of their users. Likewise, Project for Public Spaces (2007) advocate that community members offer valuable insights into a site's history, function, and challenges, making them essential contributors to meaningful and inclusive public spaces.

Traditional participation methods—such as meetings, workshops, surveys, and focus groups, facilitate direct engagement, but can be limited by barriers to access and representation. Digital tools like virtual meetings, social media, and online platforms have expanded participation opportunities but also risk excluding those without access or digital literacy. Despite these challenges, digital engagement has

successfully shaped public space projects, such as University Park in Toronto, where public input from residents, Indigenous communities, and heritage groups has guided a culturally sensitive and accessible design (Evergreen n.d.)

Smaller municipalities like Centre Wellington also use digital platforms (e.g., CW Connect) to involve residents in local decision-making. These tools reflect a growing recognition that community input not only influences the design and function of public spaces but also helps preserve and express cultural identity. A strong example is Millennium Park in Chicago, where community consultations shaped features like the Crown Fountain, an installation showcasing videos of local residents, which has transformed the park into a cultural gathering space that reflects the city's diversity and fosters a sense of belonging (Huang & Svendsen 2014).

Understanding Community Participation

Inclusive public space design has the power to create welcoming environments where diverse communities can connect and feel represented. Rather than neutral visuals, landscapes are shaped by social contexts and power dynamics (Holloway & Hubbard 2000). This means that the priorities of municipal planners may not always align with those of the communities they serve, potentially sidelining local cultural values. To counter this, a shift from top-down planning to inclusive, community-driven models is essential (Arnstein 1969).

Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation outlines levels of public involvement, from nonparticipation to full citizen control (Arnstein 1969). It emphasizes the need to move beyond tokenism and empower communities to meaningfully influence decisions. Similarly, the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum categorizes engagement into five levels including inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower, offering planners and designers a framework to design context-sensitive and transparent participatory processes (IAP2 n.d.). These tools underscore that not all participation is equal. Effective engagement must go beyond surface consultation to involve and empower communities. When people help shape the spaces they use, those spaces are more reflective of their needs, more meaningful, and more sustainable. Inclusive design, grounded in real participation, promotes equity, community identity, and long-term success.

Community Driven Approaches

Inclusive public space design begins with meaningful community participation. Placemaking, a community-driven method, supports this by encouraging collaboration and direct involvement.¹⁰ Rooted in people-centered planning, it connects physical, social, ecological, cultural, and spiritual aspects of place. For placemaking to be effective, it must prioritize community needs and sustained engagement, aligning with the collaborative level of the IAP2 Spectrum. A values-based, place-led approach can help planners and designers

create inclusive public spaces by elevating community voices and reinforcing a shared sense of place.

Visual Approaches in Qualitative Inquiry

Visual methods like photovoice, concept mapping, and collage offer creative, inclusive ways to engage participants by illustrating lived experiences, particularly among underrepresented groups. These approaches support participatory research by enabling expression beyond words and fostering deeper emotional and reflective engagement.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory community-based research methodology empowering individuals to capture and share experiences using self-taken photographs. Powers and Freedman (2012) reviewed photovoice studies, finding it a valuable but underused method for addressing environmental issues and promoting social justice. Challenges included risks to participants and limited resources for data collection/analysis. These are important because photovoice often involves vulnerable individuals, potentially exposing them to further risks. Insufficient funding can affect study accuracy. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering safe, equitable research relationships built on trust, respect, and collaboration, essential for meaningful and inclusive outcomes.

Photovoice is a qualitative, community-based method that can be effective for identifying trends and capturing personal experiences of a phenomenon. It can also be used to explore how greenspaces were sought out as places of relief during the phenomenon under study (Hassen 2025). The study focusing on racialized people in public urban greenspaces in Toronto, highlighted the often-overlooked systemic inequalities that urban greenspaces reinforce. The study primarily engaged participants who regularly sought out urban greenspaces, potentially neglecting those who were unable to participate due to barriers. This may have impacted the overall accuracy and inclusivity of the findings.

Photovoice can be an effective approach for engaging participants, particularly engaging youth in important social matters. It was an effective tool in exploring youth's perspectives on COVID-19 vaccinations (McKee 2024). Participants reported that photovoice provided a meaningful way to deepen their understanding and views on the topic. Four key themes emerged from the study: 1) participating in a photovoice project was an enjoyable and positively impactful experience, 2) shared group activities fostered a safe and supportive environment for participants, 3) the use of photography and the photovoice process encouraged reflection and introspection, and 4) photovoice shifted participants' perspectives (McKee 2024). This study highlights how photographs can be used to encourage engagement, reflection, and introspection among research participants.

Concept Mapping

Concept mapping uses visual representations (hand-drawn or digital) to show connections between ideas or concepts, simplifying complex processes or systems. Developed at Cornell University in the 1970s, it emerged as psychologists sought ways to depict children's evolving science understanding. In qualitative research, concept maps frame projects, reduce data, analyze themes, and present findings. While potentially text-heavy, concept maps excel at showing overlapping or related ideas, useful for researchers and designers. A study on concept mapping found it to be valuable for relational data, allowing transition between written text and visual representation (Butler-Kisber & Poldma 2010). Like design, it can be cyclical and iterative, allowing continuous idea adjustment.

Concept maps are valuable as they involve participants in reviewing and categorizing their data, ensuring accuracy and inclusivity, especially helpful for coding interview responses. However, complexity can challenge participants unfamiliar with the format. Despite disadvantages, concept maps remain a great tool for data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Their ability to organize complex relational data visually makes them helpful throughout the research process.

Collage

Collage is a visual method of expression and communication that develops meaning through collecting, selecting, analyzing, and arranging materials. The term originates from the French word *colle*, meaning “glue,” and refers to a composition made of various materials—such as paper, cloth, or photographs—assembled on a surface. Collage can take many forms, including mixed-media, photo collage, and photomontage.

Historically, Japanese artists used collage to enhance calligraphy over a thousand years ago, and it became prominent in modern art movements like Cubism and Dada. Artists such as George Braque and Pablo Picasso, notably in works like *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar and Newspaper* (1913) used collage to challenge traditional representation by layering fragmented visuals to convey multiple perspectives.

In landscape and design, digital collage has become more common with technological advances, allowing greater flexibility and experimentation. However, the hyper-realism of digital collages may sometimes reduce the emotional and tactile richness of physical methods, making them less approachable for community engagement.

Photomontage, a related method, blends photographic elements—often digitally—to create unified, altered compositions. While efficient and precise, it requires technical skill and access to software, which can limit participation.

Despite variations, collage may be an effective visual medium for expression and communication, facilitating both through visual means. A study using this type of collage in social work research revealed four themes: Collage is a vibrant visual

language for artistic expression/communication; it serves as a tool for reflection, sharing, and connection; it involves ethical considerations in associative creation; it requires attention to time, space, and place for meaningful creation (Hosseini 2024). Unlike other visual methods, collage fosters researcher-participant collaboration, integral to inclusive engagement. The same study suggested translating complex collage language into written words, raising the question of whether the goal is translation or recognizing collages as a unique understanding form surpassing traditional methods (Hosseini 2024). This perspective benefits communities facing language barriers, offering expression not relying solely on verbal/written communication.

Summary of Visual Qualitative Approaches

Visual approaches offer unique strengths for data capture and analysis. Table 1 highlights similarities and differences. Photovoice emphasizes participant-driven photography to document lived experiences. Concept mapping organizes ideas hierarchically to reveal relationships. Collage fosters creative expression by compiling images to communicate complex narratives, including cultural values.

Table 1. *Similarities and Differences between Visual Qualitative Approaches*

| Photovoice | Concept Mapping | Collage |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Visual form of inquiry · Film or digital · Imagery based · Guided by themes · Incorporates participant perspectives into research · Encourages participants to share stories through photographs and dialogue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Visual form of inquiry · Traditional or digital · Text and imagery based · Highly structured and logical · Incorporates participant perspectives into research · Connects information for influencing knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Visual form of inquiry · Traditional or digital · Imagery based · Relatively unstructured and open-ended · Incorporates participant perspectives into research · Encourages participants to express complex ideas · Represents layered and multidimensional narratives |

Collage for Qualitative Inquiry and Community Participation

In this study, *collage* refers to a physical, cut-and-paste, mixed-media method. Landscape visualizations can help preserve and communicate community histories and values (Ganciu et al. 2024), and collage supports this by enabling participants to layer visual elements that convey cultural and historical meanings. It also serves as both a reflective and conceptual tool (Butler-Kisber and Poldma 2010).

Defined as a participatory tool, collage encourages active engagement, creative expression, and cultural reflection in research. In public space design, it helps create inclusive and meaningful places by involving communities in the process. Unlike digital methods, physical collage uses simple materials, making it accessible to all

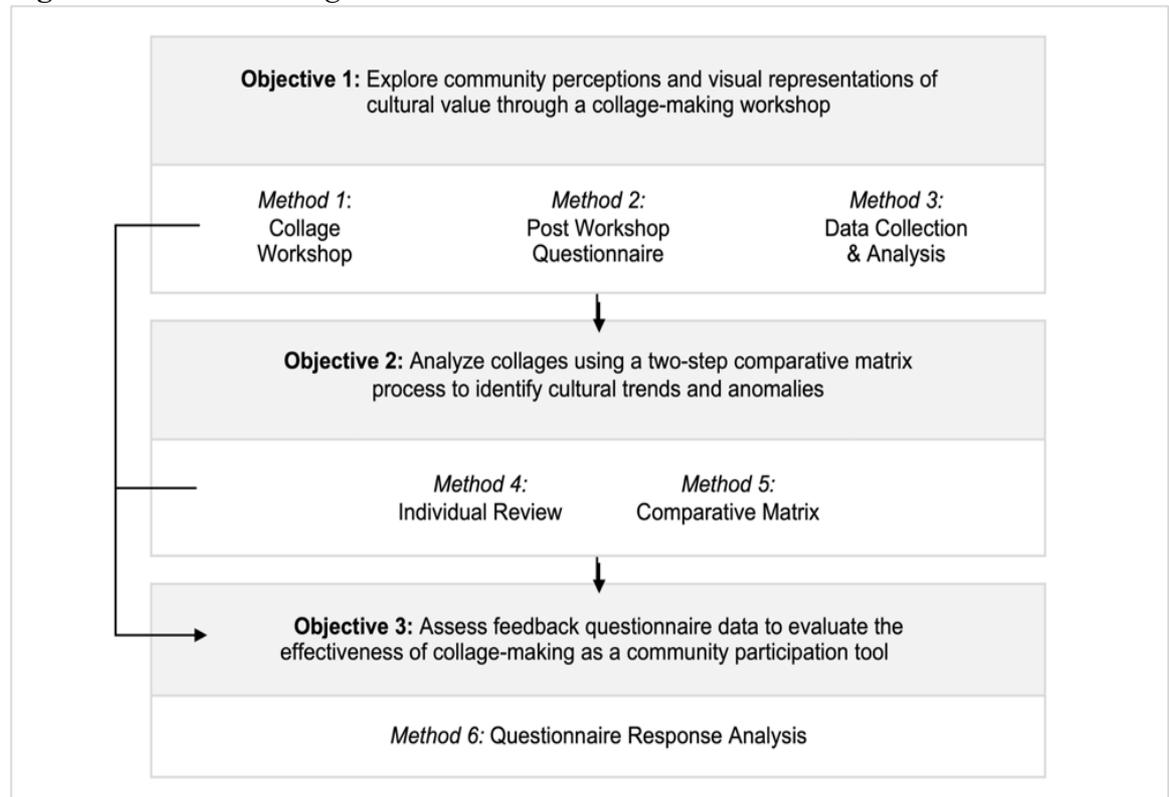
skill levels. Workshops based on collage can support dialogue and evaluation, enriching design outcomes (Powers & Freedman 2012).

Collage also aids data collection and analysis by enabling collaborative exploration of complex ideas such as cultural values. Innovative visuals are needed to raise awareness of landscape values and transformation (Ganciu et al. 2024). A place-based approach using collage may support participation and value identification. Further research is needed to explore how to translate collage's layered nature into written form (Hosseini 2024).

Methodology/Materials and Methods

This study employs a data gathering method that is designed to be flexible, allowing qualitative data to generate creative and insightful results. Figure 1 illustrates the research process.

Figure 1. *Research Design Flowchart*



Source: Lein 2025.

Collage Workshop

A collage-making workshop was planned and hosted. Its success depended on three phases: collection and organization of visual materials, recruiting participants, and hosting the event. The researcher personally curated and

provided the visual materials and supplies, carefully chosen to allow meaningful engagement with visual representation of Confederation Park.

Criteria for Selecting Visual Materials

Visual materials were curated based on criteria to ensure relevance, diversity, quality, and engagement. Materials were chosen to inspire participants and encourage meaningful engagement with park design and cultural activities and themes, catalogued to reflect park context and programming. Historical and cultural relevance was key, requiring materials to reflect significant historical events, cultural milestones, or community narratives related to the park, including archival images, maps, and newspaper articles highlighting landmarks, past uses, and transformations. Visual quality demanded high-resolution photographs and legible text-based materials. Engagement and creative potential was addressed by including decorative textures and finishes aimed at sparking conversation and storytelling, as well as connecting personal experiences with the park's visual history. Photographs, maps, newspapers, and magazines were selected to showcase diverse cultural activities and elements related to current park programming.

Collection of Visual Materials

To ensure comprehensive visual representation, materials were grouped into four categories: Historical & Archival Research involved visiting the Wellington County Museum and Archives (WCMA) to source photographs, maps, and documents related to the park, Monkland Mill, and A.D. Ferrier. Relevant materials were duplicated, and insights from a local historian on the park's evolution and events were noted. Newspapers & Publications involved analyzing past and present digital and physical newspapers (The Wellington Advertiser, EloraFergusToday, The Grand 101) for articles highlighting historical milestones and cultural celebrations, including recent editions. Park Observations & Photographing involved regular site visits between August 2024 and January 2025 to document park features, layout, and relationship with the community. 103 photographs were captured of structures, statues, plaques, and installations reflecting cultural and social significance, observing how different groups interacted with the space, including use and repositioning of benches and picnic tables. Regular visits captured seasonal changes (vegetation, weather, usage patterns), with about 60% of photos from late summer and 40% from winter. Social Media Exploration collected publicly shared images, maps, and posts from Instagram and Facebook using hashtags/geotags to understand activities and locations of personal significance, including local photographers using the park. Relevant visuals shared by CW community groups on their websites and social media were also reviewed.

These categories provided a well-rounded understanding by combining historical records, media coverage, direct observations, and social media

insights. Archival research documented history and landmarks, newspapers highlighted events/discussions, observations captured usage/seasonal changes, and social media added a modern perspective. Curating specific materials ensured focused and meaningful engagement.

Preparation of Visual Materials & Collage Supplies

Selected materials were printed, organized, and assembled into packages for the workshop. Participants received a 6"x9" cardstock base. This size was chosen as a middle ground between limiting postcard sizes (4"x6" or 5"x7") and overwhelming US letter pages (8.5"x11"), providing enough space for creativity while remaining approachable. An assortment of cut-and-paste materials (tape, glue sticks, glue rollers, liquid glue, scissors, pens, pencils, pencil crayons, markers) was provided to encourage various creative approaches.

Participant Recruitment

Recruitment involved marketing materials and an online reservation system. Outreach aimed for diverse backgrounds (young adults, seniors, newcomers, long time residents, visitors) to gather a broad range of perspectives. Promotion included physical flyers on community bulletin boards (CW Community Sportsplex, Wellington County Library, Groves Memorial Hospital, apartment/retirement buildings near the park). Digital outreach via email targeted local organizations (Fergus BIA, CW Chamber of Commerce, CW Community Foundation, Rotary Club, Elora Fergus Tourism) to encourage participation. Outreach began March 1, 2025, after conditional ethics approval from the University of Guelph. Interested individuals reserved spots online, limited to 10 participants with a waitlist (two people signed up).

Hosting the Workshop

The workshop took place March 8, 2025, 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM in Board Room A at the CW Community Sportsplex, with nine participants of varying ages, backgrounds, and experience. One participant could not attend due to illness; there was no time to offer the spot. While scheduled for three hours, all collages and questionnaires were completed within one to two hours. Participants received verbal and written information on the project and ethical considerations at the start. Formal ethical approval was obtained (University of Guelph REB#1560). Participants consented to collages being analyzed, included in the report, presented at thesis defense, and workshop photographs being published to document the process and results. Photos from the workshop document participant engagement, materials used, and completed pieces, capturing moments of idea exploration and collaboration. Participants sat around a

boardroom table with materials; the researcher delivered opening remarks, provided guidance, and answered questions, walking around three times to encourage discussion.

Photos from the collage workshop document how participants engaged with the activity, the materials they used, and their completed pieces. The images capture moments of idea exploration and collaboration, highlighting each participant's unique style. Participants sat around a boardroom table with access to a variety of collage materials. Opening remarks and guidance was provided, and any questions were answered prior to the participants' workshop. A walk around the table three times was conducted to encourage discussion.

The questionnaire was seeking to gain insight on the validity of collage-making as a participatory tool as well as collage as an effective way to represent cultural values (Figure 2). Participants were encouraged to complete the questionnaire within the allotted time. In addition, three open-ended questions were included to gather candid feedback and personal testimonials. However, data from the open-ended responses were not used for analysis.

Figure 2. Post Workshop Questionnaire

| Collage Workshop Feedback Questionnaire | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Please complete the following questions about your experience in the collage workshop. All responses are anonymous and will be used for data collection. | | | | | |
| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| Collage as a Public Participation Tool | | | | | |
| 1. The collage workshop made me feel more engaged with the topic or theme presented | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Collage-making is an effective way to communicate ideas and emotions in public participation activities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. I felt comfortable expressing my thoughts and opinions through the collage-making process | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. I would be more likely to participate in community projects if they included creative activities like collage workshops | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. The workshop encouraged meaningful discussions and interactions with other participants | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. The collage workshop helped me feel more connected to my community and its shared experiences | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Expression of Cultural Values | | | | | |
| 7. Collage-making helped me express ideas that are important to my community | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Creating a collage allowed me to preserve and share important cultural symbols, traditions, or stories in a meaningful way | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. Compared to other participation methods (e.g., discussions, surveys), collage provided a more inclusive way for diverse perspectives to be expressed | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. My final collage successfully conveyed the emotions or messages I intended to communicate | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

| Additional Questions |
|--|
| Please use the space below to share your feedback on the following open-ended questions. Responses in this section will be used solely for testimonials and not for data collection. |
| 1. Do you feel that collage workshops are an effective way to engage the public in community discussions? Why or why not? |
| 2. How do you think collage, as a qualitative research method, allows for more inclusive and diverse expressions compared to other participation methods (e.g., interviews, discussions, surveys)? |
| 3. Do you have any additional thoughts or feedback that you'd like to share? |

Source: Lein 2025.

Data Collection & Analysis

All nine collages were photographed and documented to create a visual archive. Basic notes were recorded on materials, layout, and visual themes. Drawing on a comparative review framework by George (2021), a two-step process guided the analysis:

- **Individual Review:** Each collage was individually analyzed for physical and visual components—such as materials, colour palettes, imagery, and text—capturing both tangible (e.g., trails, benches, lawns) and intangible elements (e.g., events, traditions).
- **Comparative Matrix Analysis:** To further explore cultural heritage themes, a comparative matrix was used to identify and compare tangible and intangible cultural heritage elements across collages. This process revealed patterns, relationships, and areas of cultural significance (**Figure 3**).
- **Questionnaire Response Analysis:** Furthermore, the post-workshop questionnaire responses were analyzed to identify trends and patterns in participants' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. Each response was assigned a numerical value corresponding to the agreement scale (e.g., Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Disagree nor Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree). The data were collected and analyzed for frequency distributions and overall trends.

Figure 3. *Individual Collage Review*

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Participant # | | Physical Characteristics | |
| | | Materials | |
| | | Textures | |
| | | Visual Characteristics | |
| | | Colour Palette | |
| | | Cultural Imagery | |
| | | Activities & Practices | |
| | | Park Elements | |
| | | Cultural Symbolism | |
| | | Text | |
| | Cultural Themes | • • | |

Source: Lein 2025.

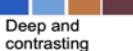
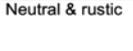
Results

Results are organized around three central themes from the analysis: 1) Collage for visual representation, exploring how participants visually communicated ideas, places, and emotions connected to the park. 2) Collage for cultural expression, revealing embedded cultural symbols, narratives, and heritage through imagery and text. 3) Collage for community participation, emphasizing the workshop setting as a space for dialogue, reflection, and co-creation where individual and collective values emerged.

Collage for Visual Representation

The collages were analyzed through their physical and visual qualities, along with the cultural imagery and symbolism they conveyed. Cultural values were interpreted from repeated images, texts, and participant responses, where everyday elements like benches or playgrounds reflected themes of play, childhood, and community gathering. As shown in **Figure 4** (Cultural Imagery), the analysis began with physical characteristics (materials and textures) and visual traits such as colour palettes. All nine collages used paper, photographs, magazine clippings, and newsprint, creating layered textures and diverse symbolism. Dominant natural tones such as greens, blues, and yellows varied with the seasons, linking the artwork to August's harvest hues and January's crisp, snow-covered landscapes, and reinforcing participants' connection to the natural world.

Figure 4. *Comparative Matrix of Cultural Imagery*

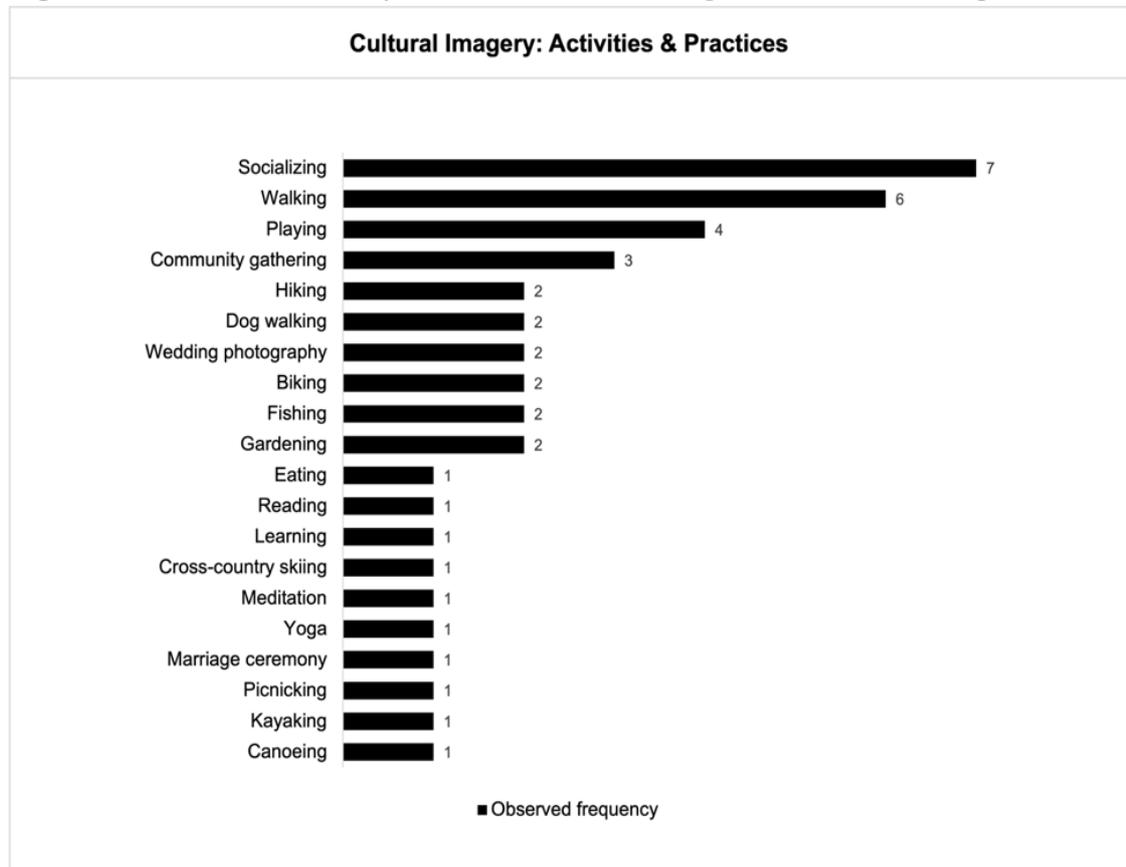
| Collage | Physical Characteristics | | Visual Characteristics | Cultural Imagery | |
|---------|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| # | Materials | Textures | Colour Palette | Activities & Practices | Park Elements |
| 1 |  Photos, newsprint | Smooth, glossy |  Earthy & natural | Gardening, socializing, playing, canoeing | Playground, mill, outdoor seating, swing set, perennial garden, edible garden, water access, lawn, pathway, forest, trail |
| 2 |  Photos, newsprint, plain paper, holographic paper | Smooth, glossy, shimmery |  Rich & earthy | Fishing, walking, biking, kayaking, picnicking, socializing | Pathway, trail, park signage, perennial garden, waterfall, forest, lawn, water access, river, shade structure, boardwalk |
| 3 |  Paper, photos, magazine | Glossy, matte |  Romantic & botanical | Marriage ceremony, wedding photography | River, forest, bridge, perennial garden, teepee, park signage, lawn, shade structure |
| 4 |  Paper, photos, newsprint, pencil crayon | Glossy, matte |  Vibrant & energetic | Playing, walking, gardening, socializing, community gathering | Mill, bridge, boardwalk, pathway, edible garden, playground, swing set, outdoor seating, shade structure, forest, park signage |
| 5 |  Paper, photos, newsprint, magazine, paint colour card, tape | Glossy, matte, fibrous |  Deep and contrasting | Yoga, meditation, wedding photography, dog walking | Mill, outdoor seating, trail, boardwalk, forest, river, lawn |
| 6 |  Paper, photos, metallic paper, pencil crayon | Glossy, matte, shiny, metallic, waxy |  Playful and bright | Walking, playing, biking | Trail, park signage, boardwalk, outdoor seating, playground, pathway, waterfall |
| 7 |  Paper, photos, newsprint, magazine | Glossy, matte, shiny |  Neutral & rustic | Walking, cross-country skiing, community gathering, socializing | Boardwalk, shade structure, waterfall, mill, pathway, trail, lawn, steps, playground, pollinator garden, perennial garden, outdoor seating |
| 8 |  Paper, photos, magazine, marker | Glossy, matte, smooth |  Warm & rustic | Playing, hiking, socializing, learning, dog walking, reading, community gathering | Trail, boardwalk, forest, playground, outdoor seating, cultural installation |
| 9 |  Paper, photos, magazine | Glossy, matte |  Bold & dynamic | Hiking, fishing, eating, socializing | Park signage, boardwalk, trail, river, water access |

Source: Lein 2025.

The matrix analysis shows that collage is a valuable tool for representing complex ideas through the combination of diverse imagery. **Figure 5** (Activities & Practices) visualizes cultural activities and practices, summarizing key actions and organizing them by observed frequency. Since participants intentionally selected these images, it can be inferred that they hold cultural value. For instance, while walking may seem commonplace, it can also represent deeper values such as connection to place, daily rituals, and well-being. In the collages, imagery of trails, paths, and people walking dogs or pushing strollers highlighted these broader themes. Such movements symbolized care, routine, and belonging, reflecting meaningful connections to the park.

The cultural values represented are diverse and grounded in participants lived experiences. **Figure 5** further illustrates a strong emphasis on **socializing, walking, playing, and community gathering**. These intentional and recurring images suggest the park is valued both for recreation and for nurturing relationships, among people and between people and the landscape. Play was often depicted through images of children and families in playgrounds and open spaces, while walking appeared in scenes of trails and paths with strollers and dog walkers. Socializing emerged through depictions of people gathering in shared spaces, open lawns, and around seating areas, reinforcing the park's role as a community hub.

Figure 5. *Data Visualization of Activities & Practices represented in the collages*

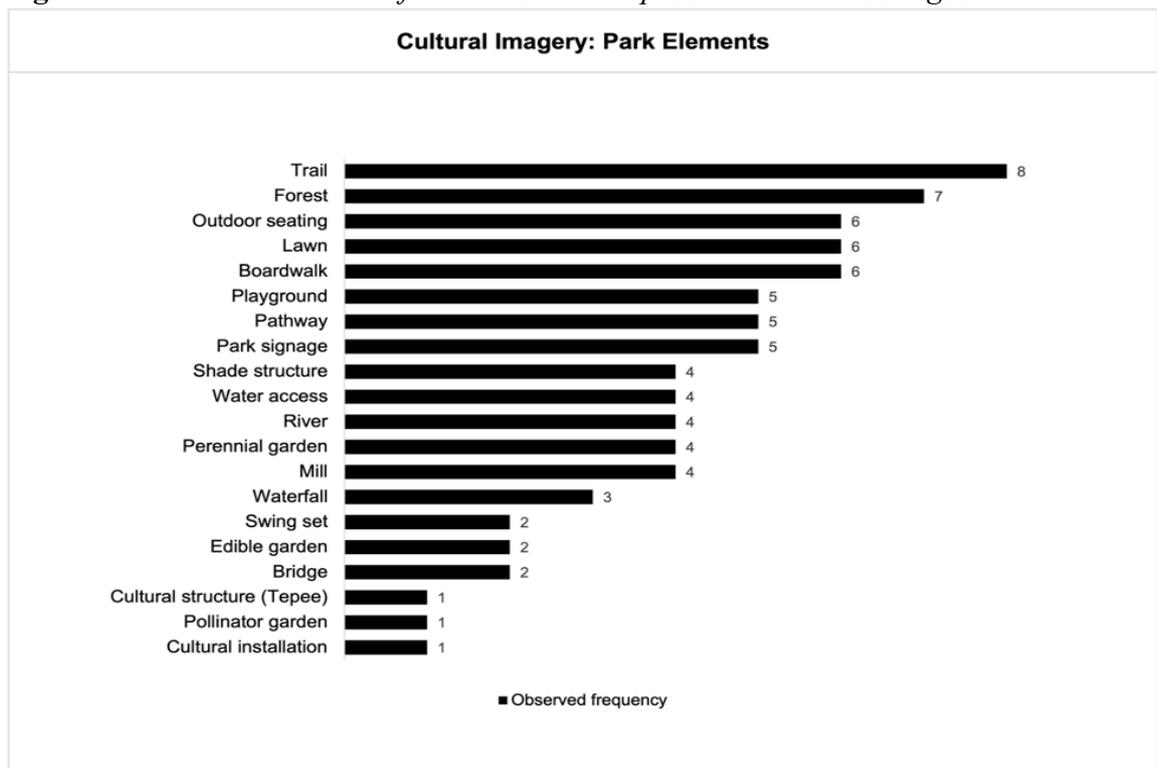


Source: Lein 2025.

Other activities, such as *reading, eating, meditating, canoeing,* and *kayaking,* were represented less frequently. Their relative absence points to opportunities for deeper exploration and potential design interventions. Given the park’s location along a calm section of the Grand River, enhancing water-based recreation could be especially meaningful. This might include more accessible launch points or interpretive features that connect visitors to the river through cultural and ecological experiences. Likewise, quieter and more reflective uses could be supported through intentional design—such as shaded lawn areas, thoughtfully placed seating, or subtle features that create micro-environments for individuals and small groups.

Collage also provides a lens for understanding cultural imagery tied to physical park elements. These features shape how the park is used and carry meanings connected to memory, identity, and shared experience. Not every element is inherently cultural; it becomes cultural when it holds social meaning or symbolic value. For example, a forest becomes cultural when it is recognized as a place for gathering or spiritual reflection. **Figure 6** (Park Elements) summarizes tangible cultural heritage elements represented in the collages, interpreting them as cultural based on their repeated presence and layered meanings.

Figure 6. Data Visualization of Park Elements represented in the Collages



Source: Lein 2025.

Figure 6 further shows strong preference for **trails, forests, boardwalks, lawns,** and **outdoor seating.** Outdoor seating stood out, with many participants including benches from various sources, suggesting a desire for comfort, rest,

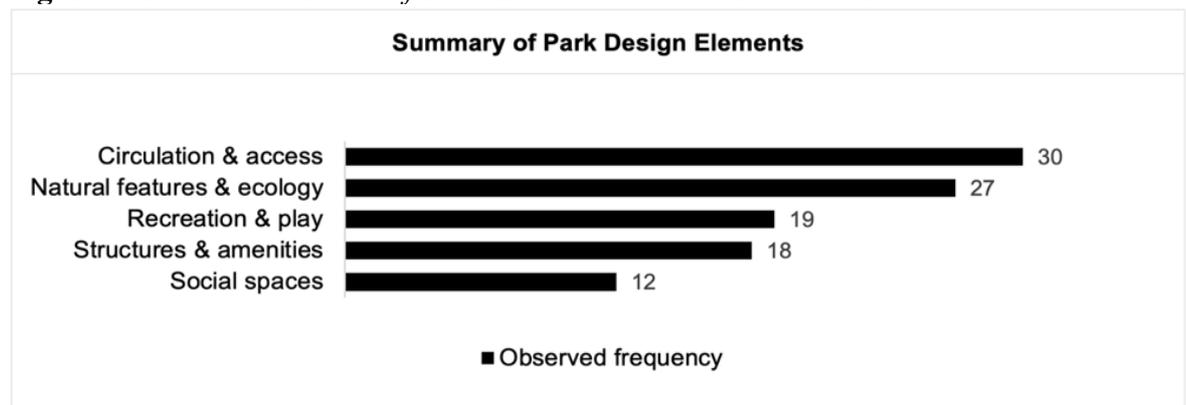
To explore potential insights, park elements, activities, and practices were grouped into new categories, summarized in **Table 2**. These categories reflect key design elements and planning considerations important for creating functional, inclusive community spaces (**Figure 8**). Each element represents a different way people value the park.

Based on the table and map, the most frequently observed categories were Circulation & access and Natural Features & ecology. These include trails, pathways, forests, and gardens, indicating a strong appreciation for movement and nature-based experiences. Recreation & play and Structures & amenities were observed to a lesser extent, showing interest in play areas, seating, and shade. Social Spaces were the least frequently observed, suggesting they may be underrepresented in the current design, though they remain important for community interaction.

Table 2. *Design Elements and Associated Park Elements, Activities, & Practices*

| Design Elements | Park Elements | Activities & Practices |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Circulation & Access</i> | Trails, boardwalks, pathways, bridges, water access, park signage | Walking, biking, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, cross-country skiing |
| <i>Natural Features & Ecology</i> | Forests, rivers, waterfalls, lawns, perennial gardens, pollinator gardens, edible gardens | Gardening, fishing, learning, reading, meditation |
| <i>Recreation & Play</i> | Playgrounds, swing sets, lawns, outdoor seating | Playing, yoga, meditation, picnicking, dog walking |
| <i>Social Spaces</i> | Cultural installations, cultural structures (tepee), historic mill, community gathering spaces | Socializing, community gathering, wedding photography, marriage ceremonies |
| <i>Structures & Amenities</i> | Shade structures, park signage, picnic areas, viewing decks | Eating, relaxing |

Figure 8. *Data Visualization of Park Elements Summarized in the Matrices*



Source: Lein 2025.

With nine participants, the frequency of observed elements suggests each person noted multiple categories, emphasizing the layered and diverse ways people engage with the park. The focus on circulation and natural features reflects broader themes of nature connection and environmental stewardship, while other elements highlight the importance of play, relaxation, and gathering.

Collage for Cultural Expression

Beyond visually representing activities and features, collages revealed deeper cultural meanings through layered text. In Participant 1's collage, values are conveyed through text and imagery. Cultural themes were inferred from words like "community garden" and "local," with visuals of gardens and nature suggesting community gathering and nature connection. Images of children's play areas with text like "kids," "healthy development of children," and "imaginative play" represented play and childhood. Food and culinary were subtly implied by a community garden, suggesting food production and shared growing spaces, less explicit than other themes. These symbolic themes reflect underlying values and priorities, offering richer insight into how people relate to the park culturally. **Figure 9** highlights key patterns identified through analysis of the cultural symbolism matrix.

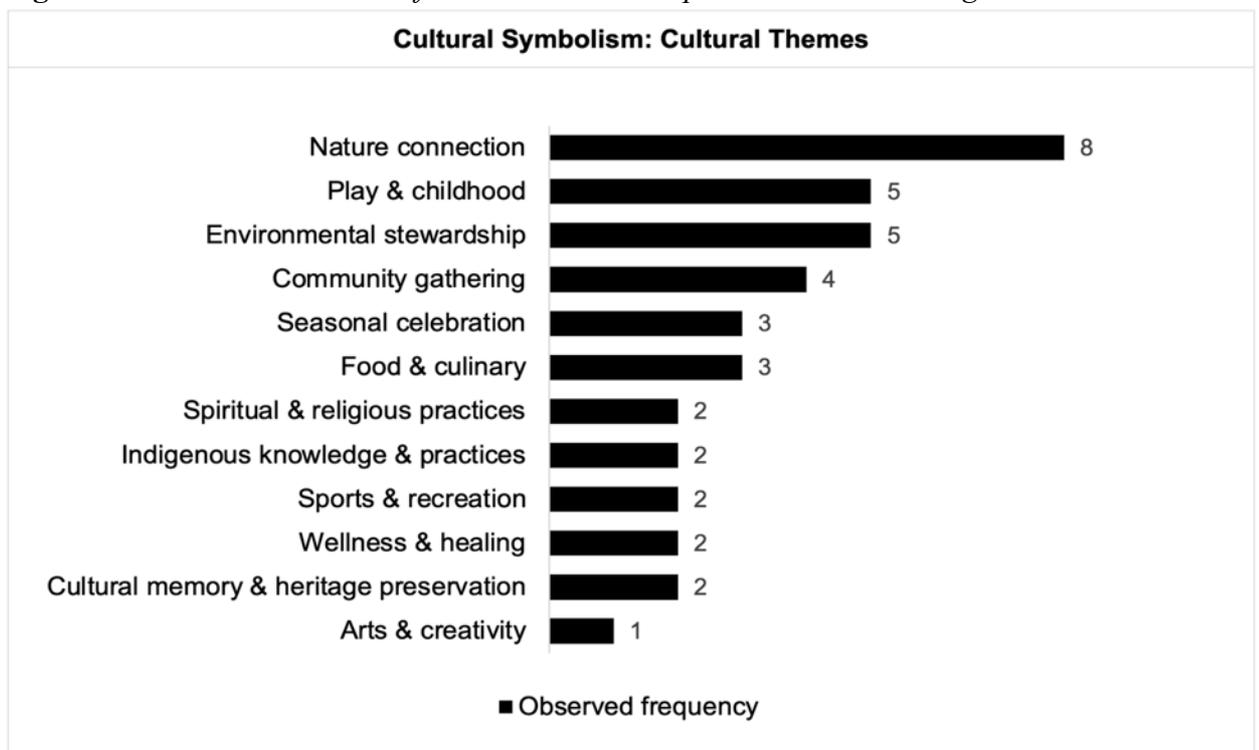
Figure 9. Comparative Matrix of Cultural Symbolism

| Collage # | Cultural Symbolism Text | Cultural Themes |
|-----------|--|---|
| 1 |  Community garden, biodiversity, thrive, kids, wildlife, nature, grasses, local, connecting, healthy development of children, to create social, creative, imaginative play opportunity for individuals for all abilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gathering • Play & childhood • Food & culinary • Nature connection • Sports & recreation |
| 2 |  Catch & release, water access and recreation activities, work together, more community input is needed since the park has a lot of people who live right along that stretch of land and don't have access to many play structures or other types of uses anywhere close, create your vision, a priority, proposed design improvements for a local Fergus park are still in the planning stages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gathering • Sports & recreation • Nature connection • Environmental stewardship • Play & childhood |
| 3 |  The future, is here, Grand River near Monkland Mills, Fergus, Ontario | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual & religious practices • Nature connection • Cultural memory & heritage preservation |
| 4 |  Rural life, growing corn, open space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gathering • Play & childhood • Food & culinary • Arts & creativity |
| 5 |  Keep it simple, the natural features of this community were stunning before us and will be stunning after we are gone, dedication to preserving local heritage properties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness & healing • Nature connection • Environmental stewardship • Seasonal celebration • Cultural memory & heritage preservation |
| 6 |  Wellness, love grows here, family, joy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness & healing • Nature connection • Play & childhood |
| 7 |  Call for action, potential for this space for theatre, dance, music, special occasions, weddings, events, festivals, breath of fresh air year-round, support pollinator populations, long strolls, journey, community, events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gathering • Nature connection • Environmental stewardship • Seasonal celebration |
| 8 |  Play, move, all ages, all nations, all seasons, care for the earth, all species, rooted resilience, transformative placemaking, the art of adaptation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature connection • Indigenous knowledge & practices • Environmental stewardship • Seasonal celebration • Play & childhood |
| 9 |  Water, easy living, year-round beauty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous knowledge & practices • Environmental stewardship • Nature connection • Food & culinary • Sports & recreation |

Source: Lein 2025.

The four dominant themes were: 1) **Nature connection**, 2) **Environmental stewardship**, 3) **Play & childhood**, and 4) **Community gathering**. These themes were strongly supported, identified by at least half of participants (**Figure 10**). This aligns with existing park elements but suggests improvement opportunities. Enhancing forest trails could strengthen nature connection/environmental stewardship; redesigning the large lawn as an intentional gathering space could better support community gathering. Strong interest in play/childhood suggests need for more playgrounds/nature-based play areas, especially given proximity to diverse housing and future redevelopment. Themes like Spiritual & religious practices and Arts & creativity were least represented, suggesting potential gaps in cultural expression and opportunities for deeper exploration.

Figure 10. *Data Visualization of Cultural Themes represented in the collages*



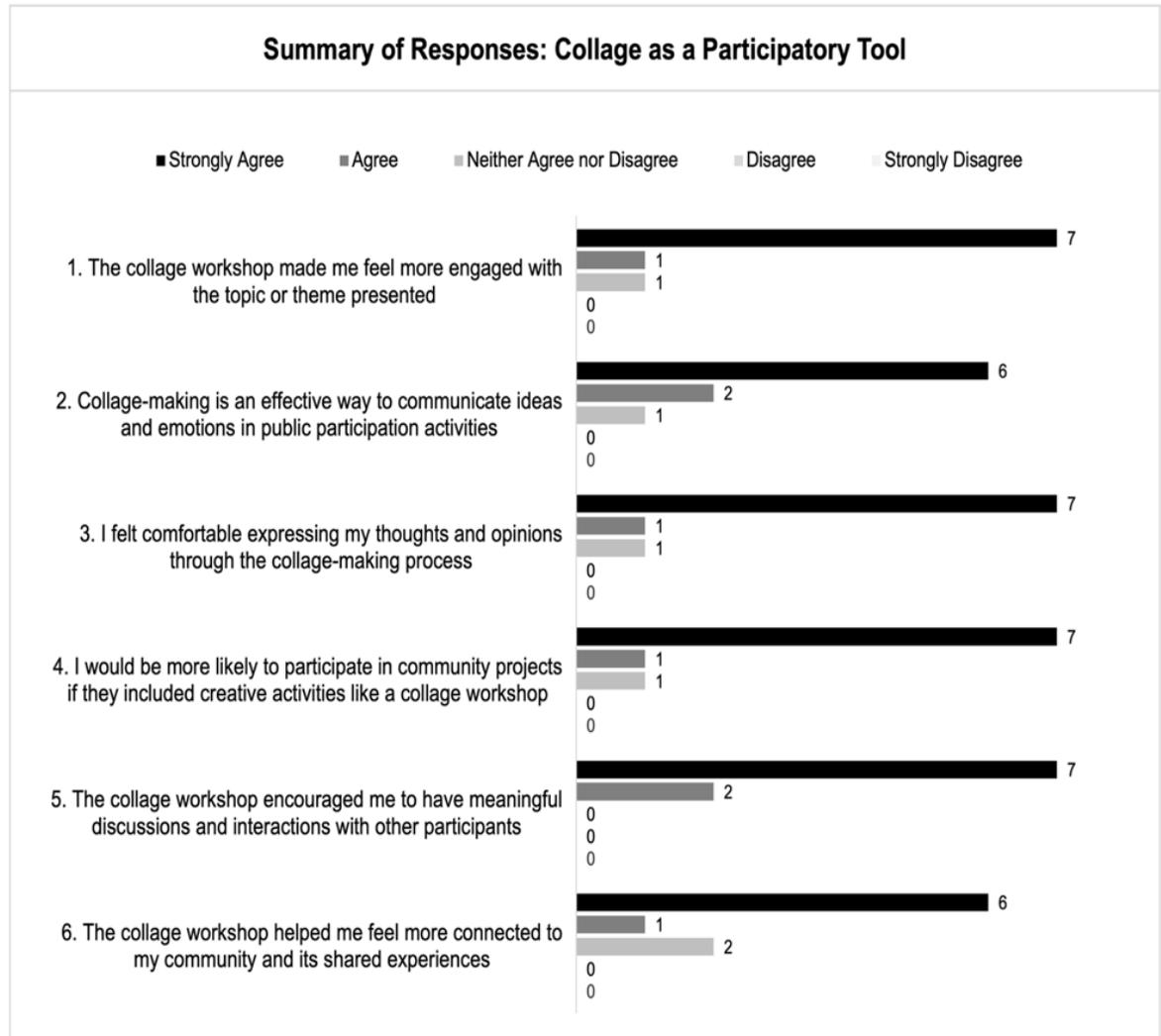
Source: Lein 2025.

Collage for Community Participation

Collage proved effective in representing cultural values and themes, with many participants viewing it as a valuable tool for community participation. **Figure 11** summarizes responses to six questionnaire questions about collage as a participatory tool. Upon reviewing matrices and questionnaire responses, collage effectively reflects and represents cultural narratives, making abstract ideas more tangible. It was a well-suited tool for public participation, allowing creative expression, inclusivity, and engagement across diverse backgrounds/skill levels. One participant's neutral response to several questions suggests

uncertainty or lack of strong opinion, highlighting the range of perspectives and ensuring uncertainty is represented.

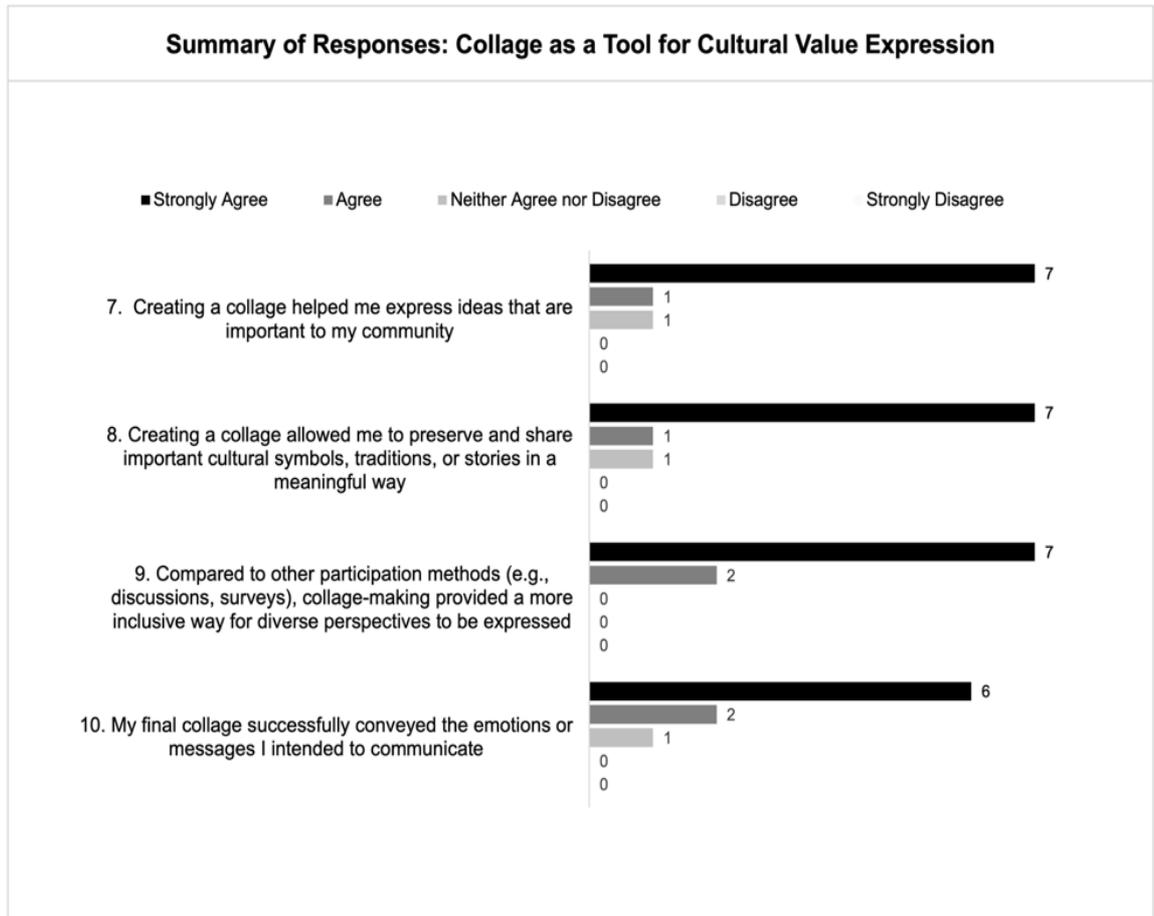
Figure 11. *Data Visualization of the Responses to Questions One through Six of the Post-Workshop Questionnaires*



Source: Lein 2025.

Collage also proved effective for expressing cultural values and themes. **Figure 12** summarizes feedback on four questions related to this. Results suggest cultural values can be identified and visually expressed through collage. Many found the method meaningful and intuitive, using it to visually communicate perspectives, identities, and relationships to Confederation Park. Collages and reflections evidenced that the method helped surface shared values like nature connection, play/childhood, and community gathering. The participant with neutral responses reminds that creative methods do not work the same for everyone. Including this range adds depth and supports a nuanced understanding of collage as a tool for cultural interpretation.

Figure 12. Data Visualization of the Responses to Questions Seven through Ten of the Post-Workshop Questionnaires



Source: Lein 2025.

In response to the open-ended question, “How do you think collage, as a qualitative research method, allows for more inclusive and diverse expressions compared to other participation methods (e.g., interviews, discussions, surveys)?”, participants reflected: “The materials offered a way to individualize responses. I can see it as part of a comprehensive method for the collages of facts and ideas”; “This would open the door for those who speak different languages and are maybe newer to the community to express their ideas.” Additional feedback included: “I found [collage] to be an interesting way to share my feelings regarding the environment”; “A more diverse group would be able to give different perspectives”; “I would do this type of activity again and found that it was a different way to express my thoughts. I wouldn’t mind more material to further express my ideas”. These responses highlight positive reactions, suggest enhancing future sessions with wider perspectives, and appreciate collage's ability for self-expression.

Discussion

Findings show that participants saw collage as an inclusive, creative tool that went beyond traditional engagement methods. Its open-ended format supported various languages, experiences, and thinking styles, helping those less comfortable with verbal communication. Collage encouraged reflection, individuality, and diverse interpretations, offering a meaningful way to express cultural values. Cultural insights emerged through selected images, texts, and written responses, with participants reminded to focus on meaning. Unlike tools that rely on speech or fixed answers, collage allowed for the expression of personal stories, emotions, and values that might otherwise go unspoken.

The hands-on process fostered both personal reflection and the uncovering of shared values, revealing collage's value as a method for exploring culture in more open, expressive, and accessible ways. It offered rich perspectives on how creativity can support inclusive qualitative research and deepen cultural understanding.

Implications of the Study

Results have significant implications for theory and practice in community workshops and qualitative methods. This section discusses how findings inform future workshop designs, cultural practices, and broader community engagement. Collage as a participatory tool allowed meaningful engagement by creating a low-pressure, creative space for visual expression, especially for those struggling with verbal communication. It encouraged idea generation, focused attention, and fostered inclusivity by accommodating varying language proficiencies and cultural backgrounds. This approach has the potential to reshape how participatory tools are designed, prioritizing accessibility, creativity, and comfort, particularly in diverse or rapidly changing communities.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations impacted the research methodology and the implementation of the workshop, affecting both its scope and execution:

- **Small Sample:** Limiting participation to 10 was due to resource/time limitations, including financial constraints.
- **Number of Workshops:** Research approval delays meant only one workshop date was feasible, limiting opportunity to engage more participants. A short promotion timeframe impacted outreach, reducing diversity of voices.
- **Seasonal Influences:** Hosting in winter may have influenced facility accessibility and participant cognitive state. Forecasted weather/travel

disruptions could hinder attendance. Winter can contribute to fatigue/discomfort, potentially impacting focus.

- **Workshop Timing:** Scheduled during the middle of the day at the start of March Break overlapped with a busy period at the Sportsplex; noise/commotion may have diverted attention.
- **Material Constraints:** Participants used only provided materials (curated paper, imagery, supplies, 6"x9" cardstock base). This constraint was intentional for a shared starting point, highlighting creativity within boundaries, and ensuring consistency for analysis.

Future Research

As collage is an emerging participation concept, potential exists for further research to support its implementation/evaluation as a qualitative method. This includes:

- **Exploring Diverse Community Contexts:** Investigating collage application across urban, rural, and culturally diverse environments. A larger sample size would enhance generalizability and provide a more diverse range of perspectives on adaptability/effectiveness.
- **Longitudinal Study on Impact:** Hosting multiple workshops could provide more opportunities to explore the creative process and effects. Several sessions with the same group could allow deeper engagement and examination of nuanced/complex ideas over time, potentially across seasons to account for impacts, revealing longer-term effects and offering a more well-rounded understanding.
- **Comparative Study:** Comparing collage with other tools (focus groups, surveys, storytelling) to evaluate relative effectiveness in fostering creativity, inclusivity, and participation. This could include examining landscape architecture firms' use of collage in participatory practices.
- **Exploring Digital Collage Tools:** Investigating how digital tools/online platforms (Miro, Canva) can expand participation, especially for those unable to attend in-person workshops.
- **Visual Design and Interpretation:** Further analysis of collage compositions could examine overall design more deeply, focusing on how elements (composition, colour, layout, scale, spatial relationships) contribute to visual impact/meaning. This may include exploring design principles (balance, contrast, rhythm, hierarchy) and how choices shape viewer analysis/interpretation.
- **Voluntary Materials:** To address material limitations, future research could invite participants to contribute own visual elements. Allowing personal images, textures, found objects may enhance creative expression, deepen connection, and provide insight into unique perspectives. This could include giving participants the option to choose their own base, fostering ownership and resulting in collages more accurately reflecting individual viewpoints.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insight into how cultural values can be identified and visually represented in Confederation Park, Centre Wellington, Ontario, through the use of collage. As both a participatory tool, collage helped surface diverse perspectives and reveal the cultural values tied to the park and its surrounding community. It also allowed participants to express personal connections to the park, illustrating how its design and use are shaped by shared histories, identities, and environmental relationships.

Building Ganciu et al. (2024) that collage can serve as a creative and imaginative method of inquiry, future research could examine how its complex visual language might be translated into written or policy formats to further inform design and planning. The study also shows that creative, non-verbal methods like collage can promote inclusivity and engage individuals who may be hesitant to speak in traditional formats. This highlights how such methods can be used to foster deeper connections and broader participation in community-driven projects, especially when engaging diverse groups with varying perspectives.

Additionally, the findings highlight the need for innovative participatory tools that reflect cultural diversity and the growing demands of communities. Collage offers those benefits by being adaptable and personal, especially in contexts where understanding and integrating cultural values is essential. Visual tools can support planning processes while helping to preserve culturally meaningful landscape values (Ganciu et al. 2024). This is especially relevant in participatory planning. In this way, collage can serve both as a tool for design and for engaging and communicating community narratives, expanding how cultural values are integrated into the design of public spaces.

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