

Heritage Begins At Home

What thinking globally and acting locally really means



ON A SNOWY NIGHT two months ago in Almonte, Ontario, I attended a meeting arranged by the Heritage Resources Committee of the Lanark County Heritage Regions Project. The group

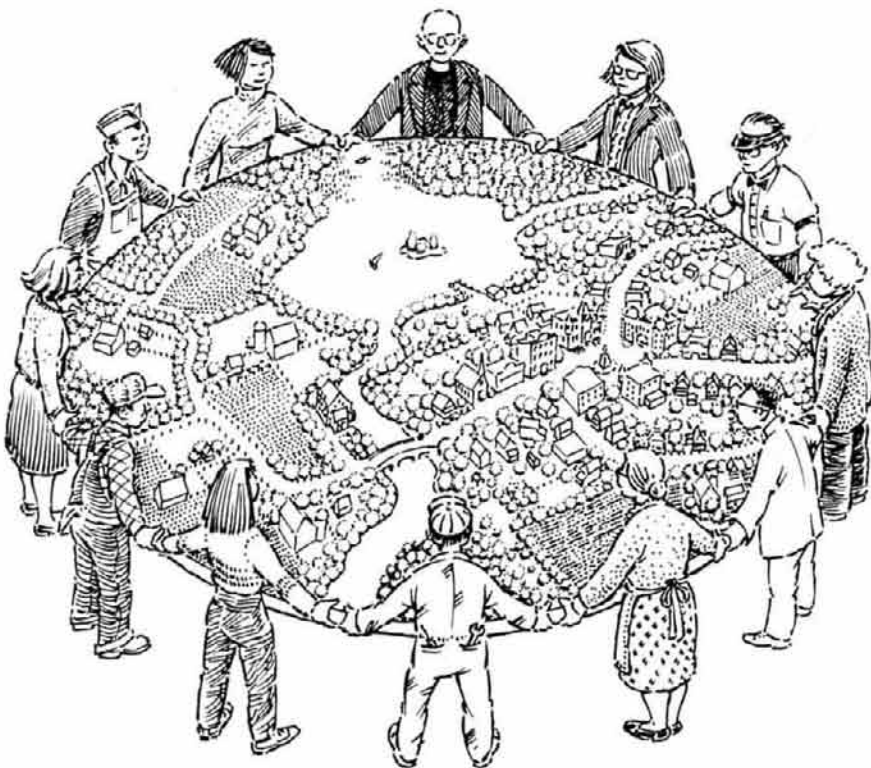
was a varied mixture of shopkeepers, business people, the mayor, a local historian, a descendent of the textile mill-owner who founded the town, people who had retired to the community, and people who lived in Almonte but worked in Ottawa, 45 minutes away.

As the group identified heritage resources, constant reference was made to tourism. Some said they were proud of their region and wanted to share it with visitors. One local businessman, however, was more to the point: tourism, he said, meant money.

The group identified buildings and natural features as some of their valuable heritage resources. Many lamented the pollution of the rivers and lakes. But their single most important heritage resource, the participants agreed, was the people of the area: their personalities, their skills, their know-how, their history, their traditions.

As I returned to Ottawa late that night, I found myself reflecting on the meeting's three chief topics: the environment, cultural identity, and the economy. It struck me that these were the elements which not only inspired the creation of Heritage Canada's Heritage Regions Programme but also established its national and international contexts. These three elements constantly dominate the news. But while we are all aware of the problems associated with them, few of us feel that we are able to do anything about them.

The environment is a good example of what I mean. I recently read a U.S. survey which claimed that two out of



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three Americans consider themselves environmentalists. That finding is ironic, of course, for Americans are not only the most insistent polluters at home, they also encourage the creation of copycat polluting in societies abroad.

I am certain that most Canadians, like Americans, consider themselves environmentalists. But we do little to

protect the environment. Why is this? I think that this is largely because environmental conservation is, on a global level, an abstraction. We know that the forests of Brazil are threatened, for example, and we feel helpless. We are confused and frustrated and treat any threat to the environment as beyond our grasp.

As a result, advice from environmental groups goes largely unfollowed. Most of us, for example, find placing a brick in the toilet tank to save water insignificant. Most politicians, faced with the enormous scope and cost of the environmental task, concentrate on side issues while others, representing big business interests, are often hostile. Even environmental experts add to the confusion. For some, the ozone layer is in critical condition; for others, its condition is seasonal, perfectly natural, and harmless. For some, the "green" items promoted by certain supermarket

By Jacques Dalibard

chains are environmentally-friendly; others claim that such products as "green" garbage bags, which supposedly turn into non-biodegradable pellets, are marketing gimmicks.

In the face of all this, what can we do about the environment? Probably very little – if we think only about issues like the Brazilian rainforests. But I believe that, if we start with our own backyard, we can manage environmental change. This means starting with the trees on our streets, the river at the end of the road, the marshes just outside town. It means starting, in other words, with the immediate environment in which we live. And when that happens, environmental conservation, far from being an abstract notion, becomes a daily part of our lives. There is even a global pay-off: by acting locally, we will eventually influence neighbours, politicians, and corporations to act on the national and international level, as well.

Another notion that, at first glance, seems abstract is cultural identity. But cultural identity, like the environment, is actually an explosive issue. We need not look to faraway Azerbaijan or Latvia to underscore this point. Here in Canada, from Newfoundland to B.C., tension due to cultural identity flairs up on a regular basis. The debate over Meech Lake is a perfect illustration. Problems concerning cultural identity occur because Canada is, in the end, a composite of many regions, each distinctly itself, each unlike the others. Because of our regional nature, it's understandable that the people of B.C., say, resent Canada being defined in terms of Ontario. The cultural identity of B.C. – the mix of topography, climate, buildings, traditions, occupations, and values – is different from Ontario's. Most people explain western alienation in economic terms, yet for the average citizen – the teacher, the nurse, the factory worker, the bureaucrat – it is not economic status which distinguishes one province from another. The problem is that, too often, the central Canadian establishment assumes that Canada is homogeneous – and people resent being taken for granted.

The problems may at first appear different in economically depressed areas such as Newfoundland. But even there, when we hear people being interviewed on TV following the closing of a fishery, they voice concern not so much for their economic status as for the loss of

their way of life, of their traditions, of their land. Similarly, the depopulation of rural Canada – our small towns, our fishing communities – is much more than an economic problem. It is cultural.

Cultural identity is linked to our particular locale and to our daily life. A ballet company in Winnipeg, a theatre group in Toronto, a symphonic orchestra in Montreal – these cultural assets have little impact on our daily life if we live in a small fishing village in Newfoundland or a rural community in Saskatchewan. What affects us is the life

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of our community, its buildings, its setting, its people.

It would be difficult to pretend that our third topic, the economy, is also an abstract notion. But more and more of us are losing control of our economic circumstances – as the residents of Canso, N.S. or the employees of Via Rail can certainly attest. Until recently, many more people, in relation to the population, owned their own farms, shops, businesses, or fishing boats. Many more businesses were local and modest in size. Often, the owner lived in the community and was sensitive to local needs. As a consequence, many people felt in control of their economic well-being – or, at least, close to the person who was in control. But today, an increasing number of people work for anonymous national or international corporations or large government agencies which, being more concerned with efficiency and profit, frequently ignore the individual.

The present government trend to support large corporations that can compete globally is predicated on the trickle-down theory of economics: that people who lose their jobs in the process of making companies efficient will regain employment when these companies prosper or when service industries develop as a result of increased wealth for the country. But the trickle-down

effect won't happen in Canada for a very long time since most companies are not reinvesting in Canada but are taking their money abroad.

Yet, the economy can go another way. Paralleling the growth of large corporations is the potential emergence of the small, local business. While Molson, for example, recently acquired O'Keefe to become Canada's largest brewing company and make themselves internationally competitive, at the other end of the spectrum we have seen the creation of such small local enterprises as the Ottawa Valley Brewery and Vancouver's Granville Island Brewery. In recent years, many of us have become more educated in our taste; thus the demand for customized goods has increased. Many new enterprises can be inspired by local skills, materials, and traditions. And products that disappeared because of standardization in large industries can once again be manufactured. For this to happen, it is essential to create a climate in which small businesses can develop.

Whether we talk about the environment, cultural identity, or the economy, it is clear that not all the solutions will come from the top. Many will have to come from the grassroots. And this means a new approach to peoples' involvement. It means a form of participatory democracy.

To better manage their future, people will have to start at the individual and community levels. They will approach their life in a holistic way, bringing together all aspects of the environment, cultural identity, and economy.

THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE. The Heritage Regions programme which Heritage Canada launched is one of the many solutions worth considering. It is currently being implemented not only in Lanark County but also on Manitoulin Island, Ontario and in the Cowichan and Chemainus Valleys in B.C.

The Heritage Regions program's objectives are the conservation, enhancement, and promotion of an area's natural, built, and ethnocultural environment as well as its social and economic development including demographic stability. A region is defined by its ethnic concentration, administrative boundaries, local industry, or geography – an island, a valley, a stretch of coastline, an urban neighbourhood. Essentially, however, what determines the region's boundaries are the resi-

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JUNE 6 • TOURISM AND EDUCATION

- Marc Denhez, Lawyer, Ottawa; Prof. Nathaniel Lichfield, University of London, England
- Concurrent sessions on school curriculums, archaeology, tourism policies, revitalization, landscape architecture & railway heritage
- Heritage Marketplace (displays of supplies & services for architectural conservation)

JUNE 7 • TAXATION & DEVELOPMENT

(One day registration for developers, builders & realtors)

- Bryan Patchin, Remodellers Council, National Home Builders Association, Washington, D.C.
- Hon. Christine E. Hart, Ontario Minister of Culture and Communications
- Concurrent sessions on Lowell, Mass., residential and commercial renovations, banking & marketing strategies, heritage conservation districts, taxation, GST & architects' opinions
- Heritage Marketplace

JUNE 8 • STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Sessions on focus groups, municipal heritage advisory committees and strategic planning for a provincial LACAC organization
- Tour of Rockwood Academy and Closing Banquet with Arthur Black

For more information, contact: 1990 LACAC Conference,
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dents who have both a community of interests and the ability and willingness to work together. The people of the region work collaboratively to identify and enhance their local resources. These might be human resources such as skills, know-how, traditions, history. They might be physical elements such as exceptional natural and man-built features. They might be special activities such as mining, fishing, farming, logging and manufacturing. Or they might be the availability of certain animal, vegetal, or mineral resources that can be used as attractions or as raw material for manufacture.

The Heritage Regions programme provides the context in which the residents develop, manage and promote these resources. It does this by assisting in co-ordination, organization, economic development, social development, design and marketing.

The population makes the decisions and invests its own money and time. The result is the creation of jobs, the generation of investment, the training of people, the renovation of buildings, the improvement of infrastructure, the

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preservation of natural features, the reversing of depopulation trends and the creation of new commerce, tourist facilities and manufacturing.

Last year, Mr. Mulroney told us that taking care of the environment is a *projet de société*. He's right on two counts. First, one must recognize that the environment cannot be dealt with in an isolated fashion. The environment is not only connected to cultural identity and the economy but is interconnected to every aspect of society. Every endeavour of government, whether it is national defence, transport, energy or fi-

nance, affects the environment. Yet, our government is totally compartmentalized and most of these fields of endeavour are looked at separately.

At the same time, taking care of the environment will demand a heavy cost, both in terms of personal sacrifice and the involvement of all of us. But people cannot contribute if they feel they have no control. Mr. Mulroney will have to do more than say that the environment is a *projet de société*. He will have to create a climate in which society can deal with problems in a holistic manner and in which individuals feel they have control of their own destiny. Heritage Regions is a modest attempt at creating such a society. ♦

Jacques Dalibard, Executive Director of Heritage Canada, lectures widely in North America, Europe and the Middle East. In Canada, he has been instrumental in bringing together preservation professionals, initially as the first chief restoration architect with the Canadian Parks Service, and later as a founder and president of the Association of Preservation Technology and ICOMOS Canada.