

Sep 13, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

I am trying to assess the potential for ecomuseums in this province, as part of my sustainability research program. If you know about local examples or related activities, like cultural tourism or watershed stewardship groups, please send me details, i.e., the size and location of the region, the key players, etc. I would also like to hear from you if you think an ecomuseum could help to address issues and build capacity in your region or community.

Here is some background on ecomuseums, to pique your interest:

An 'ecomuseum' is a definable region where people work together to celebrate and maintain their communities, their landscapes, and their ways of life. The region can range from a city neighborhood to an entire watershed, and the people usually include interested residents, local decision-makers, and other key stakeholders. Their work, aimed at the adaptive management of cultural and natural features, can include site development or restoration, periodic surveys, and activities designed to attract tourists. Together, their efforts create a 'museum' as they identify and interpret stories and features that reflect the cultural and natural heritage of the region, e.g., past and current industries, farming and ranching, important wildlife areas, etc. The prefix 'eco' (for ecology or the 'study of home') refers to the fact that expressions of this heritage are studied and enjoyed where they exist.

Ecomuseums were first developed in France in the 1970s to foster "holistic interpretations of cultural heritage." Over time, the model was adapted for different types of heritage sites, but it continues to provide a basis for "an agreement by which a local community takes care of a place." Currently, there are more than 300 ecomuseums around the world, including 50 in Italy, a handful in southeast Asia and Quebec, and one billed as "Canada's largest" in Alberta. Some of these "open institutions" cover large areas; others are small, isolated sites. Some rely on tourism; others are more about community engagement. Some provide a showcase for local arts and crafts; others reflect local industries and related skills. A few encourage research through local governments and universities. For online examples, see www.kalynacountry.com and <http://content.skane.com/en/node/5049>.

Unlike a traditional museum, ecomuseums are not about building or housing large collections and exhibits, so they can move quickly to help regions anticipate and respond to changing conditions. They can foster sustainability, by enhancing local identity, community engagement, and in some cases tourism. Where people are already working but are somewhat isolated in their efforts to maintain the cultural and natural values of a region, they can provide a forum for crafting shared visions, resolving conflicts, sharing information, and coordinating activities. Ultimately, ecomuseums can help people protect their land, their communities, and their way of life, by giving residents a strong voice and the chance to influence, promote, and engage in activities that affect their region.

If you live in or know of a place where an ecomuseum might take root, please get in touch, and send this note to others who might be interested. I will post the feedback I get on my webpage at www.royalsaskmuseum.ca. I will also set up a blog or a Facebook group to foster further discussion, if there is sufficient interest.

Thanks in advance!



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