

In the Spirit of Collaboration and Future-focused Development...

This session, as well as two that preceded it—the Cape Breton Partnership’s round table on the economy, and CBU’s *Innovation Summit*—are now focussed on organising an Island-wide response to the growing call for recreating our economy with a new reliance on our culture.

Ian McNeil briefly told us about the *Prosperity Framework* (facilitated by Cape Breton Partnership). I didn’t get details, but they are available on the related [web site](#), and I will certainly be following up. In short, the Framework was created in 2010 to facilitate communication among disparate groups of interested parties—businesses, community organisations, First Nations, governments, agencies. I believe it hosts regular “sector” meetings (*e.g.*, agriculture, engineering) of specific members from the different organisational groups. Ian McNeil manages the Framework. I think that Ian Green attended the March round table (this is possibly what he applied to join?), and, if so, I hope he will add some background.

Catherine Arseneau of CBU then quickly reviewed the outcomes of the *Innovation Summit* that Ian attended. We have received the Summit’s very nicely done report via Ian, and I recommend that we review it, and possibly grill Ian for details or a deeper understanding of where this is coming from/going to.

Both speakers referenced the *One Nova Scotia* committee’s *Ivany Report* on the urgent state of our economy and our demographic. I think that now is the time to be sure we’ve read and digested that, as well.

The room was invited to “discuss”. Basically, we were asked to start designing terms of reference for a “Leadership Team” that will work to develop a “Culture Strategy” (as committed to by the NS government), and, presumably, answer the Ivany Report’s call to start building an economy based on our culture.

I was concerned that most conversation focussed on monetising craft work and creating tourism events and attractions, even while everyone repeatedly said that we must *not* focus on these things. Because of that, and my own particular view of how one builds an economy on our culture, I hope that we can open minds to a broader range of approaches and concerns as we go forward. At least I think that people *want* a wider approach, and will be open to ideas that may achieve this.

CBU has reaffirmed an offer to provide \$20,000 toward leading the development of our strategy by funding an “outside professional”. Although it was not said aloud to the room, several people (myself included) then and thereafter expressed concern that this sounds very like the largely ineffective, project-based SWOT sessions we have all attended too many times, and shied away from the offer. Others suggested that we’ll need a lot more money. I have hopes that money and assistance will be forthcoming, but that we will not be forced into the same old mould; there was enough discontent expressed. Without having [David Wheeler](#), CBU president, actually there to grill, our fears remain just that. Facts will, I assume, be forthcoming as we proceed.

(In an aside, I actually think that the fellow who gave the workshop on Complexity that I have recently attended—[Mark Cabaj](#)—may be an “outside professional” who could genuinely contribute, here...)

The Province has said it will commence a province-wide study (I’m a bit fuzzy on exactly what this will be) of the culture/heritage sector next spring. A woman in the group today will play a role in that, and advises us to have our Island strategy in hand well before then (so that we come prepared, and can present a coherent case in support of our own goals). Because of this, the room feels (and she agrees) that our own strategy should be in at least first draft by October. So, we have set a fuzzy “October” as our target date for this development.

A call was made to the room for volunteers to co-chair a Leadership Team. No idea what the team will do (I guess we’ll all decide), but the two who volunteered were Catherine Arseneau of CBU, and Carol Beaton. A call for regular members at first did not elicit much response, so I volunteered. We ended with, I think, 9 members at large. I did not catch all the names, but I may be the only one from our part of the world.

I *strongly* recommend that we now take Ian’s suggestion for making this one of SABDA’s focusses, and fill me up with ideas to bring to the table.

Our Leadership Team will meet for the first time on July 14, and I hope that I will have some input from us before I go to that.

For Discussion

My own thoughts on this culture/economy thing include these ideas:

- The people at the session I attended repeatedly used the word “culture” to speak of art, the arts, crafts, artisan workshops, and “events” like festivals, plays, musical performances. I think the word means a lot more than that. Before we start to try to “monetise our culture”—and I hope building our economy on our culture means a lot more than just that—I would like to flesh out a common understanding of “culture” generally, and culture as an economic engine, more particularly. Until we do that, we won’t really be talking to each other.
- A vibrant, accessible, “living” culture/heritage sector produces:
 - broader minds = innovation
 - pride in our roots and our ability to endure = self-esteem

So, taking a longer view (in addition to whatever else we might do right now), we can tool up young minds for a more creative approach to *everything* in the future by building conscious awareness of the value of culture in daily living, and by exposing those minds to the many ways of thinking and cross-pollination that creativity provides.

- It is past time that we stop relying on governments to provide leadership and direction for improvement in any sphere. World-wide, we are getting less and less leadership in thought or deed, and there are very few governments that even try to envision a coherent future. Funding models everywhere are project-based, and responsive either to currently squeaky wheels, or to traditional routines (what we’ve always done is apparently not causing waves, so we’ll keep on keeping on).

If, for example, our governments don’t want to include culture and heritage in our school curricula (the arts are being stripped away as “wastes of money”, or are being reduced to a once-a-week taste of music or drawing or some such, with no context), then we must add this to our school system ourselves. Thinking creatively, and not demanding a lot of funding (for lack of funding is a genuine issue, regardless of politics—we just don’t have the tax base), what can we do on this Island to ensure that all of our children are raised in full awareness of and participation in our culture and heritage?

Might we be able to use the library system’s Bookmobiles and the CAP system’s CAP sites to bring culture education to our communities as after-school programmes? Can we convince the Province to do what it takes to clear up “insurance issues” that make using school busses and buildings after hours the impossible things they currently are? How can we “enforce” this kind of education on students whose parents may not want to be bothered? Should we even try? And etc.

- We should seek to fix priorities for this “creative economy” together, with as many groups and participants as possible. Then, we can work toward those agreed priorities in whatever degree of cooperation will work on a specific goal along the way. We should *not* waste cycles trying to align already existing “local” priorities to a group framework, bending them out of any shape in order to do it—this dilutes both vision and commitment/enthusiasm. Many people spoke of the need for compromise. This approach achieves only half-measures and disappointment/disaffection. Instead, I hope that we can go forward in our own ways toward a strongly stated, shared vision. Provided we have a very clear vision, and remain each and together committed to the vision, our differences will not burden our actions; rather, they will inform a broader approach to the work. The broader the approach, the likelier is innovation. In short, now is not the time for stifling.
- We are talking about basing our economy on our culture sector. We *cannot* allow this to become an exercise in better monetising “products” and “events” and “tourism experiences”. These things are certainly of value, and improving quality and business acumen and success at fundraising among our artists and crafters are desirable goals, but this is not the road to building an economy.

An economy requires productivity (not just “service” industries), creativity, and innovation to be both lively and sustainable. Consciously knowing and participating in our culture and heritage will let us *be* creative and innovative...