

Knowledge: the Magnet and the Glue

PREPARED FOR PRESENTATION TO BRAS D'OR LAKES WORKSHOP

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I am honoured to be invited to speak to this symposium. I am also a little anxious. I worry that what I have decided to say will not meet the planners' expectations.

I was asked to speak about the social and economic impact of the Bras d'Or Lakes. My immediate response was to decline because I had neither the knowledge nor the resources to do that difficult job. As I saw it, one would have to cite facts and figures about the dollar value of fish and shell fish harvests, aqua culture production, shipping traffic, employment rates, recreation and tourism revenues - all attributable to the Bras d'Or. These figures are available for larger jurisdictions (e.g., the Province and DFO region), but that have to be broken-down for the Lake. Besides, some of you in this room have a good sense of some of these values. On the social side, one would want to cite facts and figures about the Lake's role as a supporter of healthy, cohesive communities through education, transportation, information technology, and health services. Again, figures can be ferreted out for individual counties and communities, but not for the Lake region as such. Yet, the symposium planners are right: these are critical data for any discussion that leads to (in the words of the concept paper) "collaborative planning to meet the objectives for the Bras d'Or".

Instead of flatly refusing the invitation, I offered to find someone who could find and analyze the figures for the Bras d'Or. That didn't work either. So, I'm sidestepping the explicit assignment. I understand the need for a solid, comprehensive analysis of social and economic benefits attributable to the Bras d'Or. It is a job that must be done if anyone is serious about setting and achieving economic and social development goals for the Lake region. In itself, the task of pulling together such an analysis is fundamental, necessary and formidable. It is an imperative for the immediate future.

I will speak about the social and economic implications of the Lake, as I see them. I rely on my background, a background that is not terribly different from those of you who spent a major portion of your life living beside the Bras d'Or. My perspective also comes from years of trying to encourage citizens to be the prime movers, rather than the objects of, social and economic development measures.

With social and economic impact in mind. I will attend to three tasks: (1) describe the way I see the Bras d'Or Lakes area now; (2) consider the idea of building a

Lake Community; and, (3) suggest an approach for continuing to build a culture of collaboration. Knowledge is the thread that runs through my remarks; knowledge to produce the Magnets and the Glue that's necessary for the kind of Lake Community I think is being envisioned during this symposium. To give credit, the terms "magnets" and "glue" come from a 1999 book, by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a Harvard business professor. Her concern is about how to thrive locally in a global economy. She sees the magnets as attracting companies and people, with the glue being the stuff in a community that holds the activity and the people together.

How the Lakes Appear Now

I will begin with the Lakes' economic magnets. Speaking in strictly commercial terms, they are few. That's not new. In the course of my lifetime the Lake was a place where very few people turned for a living, and then only a marginal living. Now, as was well presented here yesterday and again today, fish and shellfish in the lake face disappointing odds. In short, as matters currently stand, commercial level fishing has minimal economic impact, it is not a magnet. The important question is whether it can become one.

The same can be said for wealth generated by shipping. There was a time when wood was shipped through the Lake, and for course there is gypsum. But, do we even know what revenues are gained from Bras d'Or Lakes shipping?

The absolute beauty of the Lake is undoubtedly a magnet that accounts for some of the revenue gained from tourism and from summer-season residents. We have estimates about the value of the Cabot Trail and the Louisbourg Fortress as magnets for visitors, but do we know what it is for the Bras d'Or? There are likely some figures relating to recreational boating and servicing of all crafts that ply the Lake.

Those of us who live here year-round are able to comment on the pleasure we derive from seeing the lake. Some of us will go so far as to say that without it we would not stay. However, as a community we don't estimate the economic benefit on that magnetic feature of the Lake.

Easier to estimate is the economic benefit the Lake provides as a site for research and development. The work being done through the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources and the Bras d'Or Lakes Aquarium and Research Centre; the studies by various agencies and institutions that track or test aspects of the Lake; these are definitely contributing to our economy, although I expect we do not know the dollar figure. I have a hunch that the Lake as a site for research is the aspect that might become its strongest economic magnet.

Turning to look for magnets on the social side, the story is repeated. We do not have a handle on the impact of the Bras d'Or. We are quite certain that our relatively clean and quiet environment attracts and holds people here. Less magnetic is our business climate - if, for no other reason, because of its small size and scattered concentration. Despite apparent difficulties, our education and health care services are of good quality. Yet, I have observed first hand that promising young people who might either remain here or be persuaded to establish their place of work where they can enjoy the ambiance of the lake are discouraged by remoteness in relation to schools, medical services, recreation amenities, and -for many- by the absence of high speed internet services. Said simply, for many talented and courageous young people the lake's beauty does not merit the trade-off of spending large chunks of their own or their children's lives going through the hassle of accessing normal day-to-day services and amenities.

I am not pleased to present this dismal picture of the Lake as a social and economic magnet. Certainly I don't want it to be that way. I believe, however, it is a serious reality that has to be faced if we want the Lake to be a magnet for economic and social development. If the Lake is to be a magnetic unit for development the very first task is to be able to describe what that unit now looks like, using indisputable facts and figures.

The Glue part is more encouraging - that's our physical and social infrastructure. There is no denying we live in a pleasantly safe environment where strong family and community support is a hallmark. Yesterday we heard about the very impressive range of activity being carried out to enhance the Bras d'Or. Through the Sustainable Communities initiative (SCI) and the Pitu'paq partnership there is evidence that our respective levels of government are paying coherent attention to the Lake. This symposium is itself generating glue to hold pieces together as it fashions the Lake into an integrated unit. In the words of the concept paper, it's about "increasing the efficiency of existing players in

the Bras d'Or." What the existing players are doing is wonderful. Yesterday we celebrated that fact.

Recently, I had the pleasant experience of gathering representatives of these groups - and a few additional interests - to form a steering committee to explore the prospect of achieving special UNESCO designation for a portion of the Lake (the canyon in St. Andrew's channel). Although that exercise has only begun I am confident about the willingness and ability of that volunteer committee to see what can be made of the opportunity. Taken together, all of these initiatives are evidence of the high quality glue being produced to begin holding the Lakes together as a development unit. Through research and measures to deal with various forms of pollution they are already fostering social and economic benefits.

Encouraging and significant as these initiatives are, they still do not supply enough glue. If the twenty-five Issues listed in the concept paper are valid, they point to the need for enormous economic and social infrastructure. That summary of main issues in the Bras d'Or lakes (reported in Appendix I) was compiled from existing reports and is essential for planning. It covers a very broad gamut and, as Garth Bangay told us, the issues are to be validated through a consultation process.

This brings me to the essence of the matter. The extensive work that is being done is both necessary, laudatory, and must continue. Furthermore, it now needs to reach out and gradually include more people. The general population living within the Bras d'Or Lakes watershed does not see itself as a community. That understanding has yet to be built.

So, for whom are these "the issues"? Certainly no one in this room would dispute them. However, they are not significant as bases for action until at least a large portion of the population understands - and acknowledges - them as genuine, problematic concerns, as distinct from a list of general headings. That depth of understanding comes only after there is opportunity to relate to facts and circumstances in terms of their own experience. Only then might they be motivated to work with you, to support you as their leaders, as you take action on those issues, it's a long-term job of human development that will lead, in turn, economic and social development. It's a job we don't do very well and I want to encourage this symposium to think very deeply as these issues are being validated. Surely the goal is not just to stir up government action. Better to first build the capacity of many people living around the Bras d'Or Lakes to adopt a vision of a community whose centre is the Lakes - with assistance from government.

It is easy to acknowledge some of the very tangible physical issues such as roads, electricity, sewage disposal, communication services, education and training. We know quite a lot about those, what they cost and why they are not improving the way we would like. Less easy to see is the need for social infrastructure to solve problems. That's the element that will enable us to find the data and weigh to alternatives to the point of knowing precisely what has to be done and how to do it. This is the glue that brings people together systematically around common concerns with ample information and opportunity to take part in difficult decisions. It is a learning process for everyone. Right now that glue (i.e. the ability to solve problems) is in short supply. More of it will come as various groups proceed to establish a Lake community; as they learn to engage effectively in issues about which they care deeply.

Building A Community

This symposium is a major step in the direction of building a lake community. This assembly of leaders already has a lot of influence over what might become of the Lake. I am very hopeful about you. You know already that it takes enormous trust to work together on common objectives. It is hard to be sure who is in it for the long haul. After all, we have many examples of coalitions breaking down as soon as a brighter option appears. I think, for example, of how some entities within Strait Highlands RDA dropped-out over time to pursue the interests of their particular entity.

As you determine the next steps for developing collaborative management in the Bras d'Or Lakes you will likely select a few issues that will get people thinking about the Lake as a unit for economic and social analysis. Pitu'paq caught our attention last winter with its project relating to dumping of sewage from boats. Although a relatively small issue, it's very controversial. The Stewardship Society relentlessly pushes at the issue of water quality, raising awareness of the sources of contamination. The Preservation Foundation established an exhibition on the Ecology of the Bras d'Or. These and the other important measures we heard about yesterday are still not sufficient to convince a majority of residents of a need for change, not to mention of their responsibility to get behind change. These measures are raising awareness. But there is a long road between awareness and changed behavior.

A Lake Community would have residents who know what the Lake really looks like. They will know, for example, the results of the survey of domestic sewage disposal systems. They will know in graphic terms about

the negative effect on the Lake of badly managed landscapes, be that from woods operations, site clearance, gravel pits ... They will know how polluted the lake is where they live, and why. They will come to appreciate that individual householders have to take responsibility for remedial measures with, where necessary, financial assistance to do so. They will know the sources of contamination of the Bras d'Or and what has to be done to stop them. They will know which ones are the more promising directions to go if the Bras d'Or Lake is to contribute much more than it does now to the social and economic well-being of the community.

When a population is broadly informed about the Lake it will assist you, the leaders, to move forward. A population won't do that without very specific information, sometimes - information they have helped to gather, information that is openly and deliberately shared by you, in a timely way and without candy coating, A Lake community that has the glue you provide through honest disclosure will enable you to get things done far more quickly than now.

This brings me back to the list of issues. Taking the one on youth for example, I absolutely agree that the need to stop youth out-migration is an issue. What are the facts about that issue? It's a major concern in all of rural Canada. If a rigorously selected youth group were given a well designed task of examining that issue, they themselves will end up understanding the implications for themselves and for the community of their decisions to leave or to stay. Presumably they would enable the whole population to see what youth are confronting as they decide to stay or leave. Then there will be some knowledge of what, if anything must change. My point here is that each issue requires probing, preferably probing with the help of those who are key to the issue. That kind of approach to each issue will help to build a Lake community.

Less than a week ago I spent a long, hard day - nearly eleven hours - at the Social Science and Humanities Research Council in Ottawa. It's one of the granting councils for Canada's universities. I was one of nine adjudicators recruited as volunteers from across the country who had just slogged through thousands of pages of tightly crafted words. We had read 38 research proposals to be carried out by partnerships between universities and communities. About half of them will be funded to the tune of a million dollars each. I mention this because the experience told me in no uncertain terms that the "science" of social and economic development is at a very primitive level here and in western society generally. You see evidence everywhere, not least in Iraq where it was known how to destroy a regime, but not known how to foster development of a far better replacement.

Building a Culture of Collaboration

You look forward to building a culture of collaboration. This symposium is helping you to figure out how to do that. If you wanted to build, for example, a super computer, there would be no shortage of tested models and competent advisers. The same is not true for building a culture of collaboration. The knowledge of how to do that is not well tested. There is no reliable prototype that you can adapt to fit this situation. It is a unique situation to which some general principles can be applied. That in itself is a critical point: agreeing on general principles. For example, you might choose to get up to date information about the social and economic impact of the Lakes by securing funding, hiring a firm to do the job and accepting their report. Or, you might use the need for data as an opportunity for interest groups to learn about some of the challenges of creating a Lake community. Some funds will still be required for them to gather the data with a little help from experienced researchers. That way you will end up with groups of local experts. For example, the Tourist association, or the union of construction workers, or... will come to know how the Bras d'Or Lakes impacts their industry. You might choose to employ the principle of having people learn about the Lake by being part of the research process. As in the youth example, consider the potential effect of having a range of interest groups involved in the question of what value the Lake has for them.

Why not be at the front of the pack and acknowledge that the very process of developing and executing a collaborative plan for the Bras d'Or is an undertaking that itself can be developmental? I say "the front" because I believe that Canada is rapidly recognizing the need to produce knowledge about building a better society. Thus, a design to achieve a Bras d'Or Lake community within a culture of collaboration is itself a research area; one that can be carefully spelled-out and, subsequently qualify for funding through agencies which are now very concerned about learning how to build modern, democratic, civil society.

As you approach the job I want to suggest a few questions whose answers have to power to attract the attention and support of a host of interests, including funding agencies.

Why do you want to build a culture of collaboration? In terms of the Bras d'Or Lakes, why is collaborative management necessary?

What is it about the Lake that has to be changed/maintained and where is the evidence?

You know at least some of the answers. The challenge is to catch the attention and support of

residents to help them learn and to help you achieve your development goals.

How do you bring conflicting views into some kind of productive conclusion? That's the toughest one of all, so that you don't end up with factions of winners and losers.

I will conclude by revisiting a few points I have already made:

- (1) Surprisingly little is known about the social and economic impact (actual and potential) of the Lakes. That will be remedied as work begins on the list of issues that have already been identified; working in a way that creates a lake-centered community where a large portion of the population knows what it takes to build the community it wants.
- (2) In the world of hard science questions are quite easily generated and suitable sources to investigate them are relatively easy to find. In the world of social science, questions are considerably more difficult to isolate but, once specified, may be investigated very fruitfully with the help of those who care about the question.
- (3) I do not mean to downgrade the urgency of the hard science questions. Indeed, I look forward to the prospect of having the Bras d'Or serve as a laboratory for important aquatic research; that is a potential bright spot for future development - a potential magnet. But I also urge you to think as well about the Bras d'Or as a laboratory for testing approaches to economic and social development by engaging those for whom the issues are significant to discover ways to transform their social, cultural, and political circumstances. That is potential glue.

Finally, I have taken a rather long view of the social and economic impact of the Bras d'Or Lakes, emphasizing the need to treat the Lake as a unit for analysis with respect to its natural resources and those who live within the Lake's watershed area. I have stressed that building a culture of collaboration to achieve a Bras d'Or Lakes community requires digging much more deeply into the minds and hearts of the general population. It is not a sell job; it's a learning job.

In the end it is all about knowledge; knowledge to create effective magnets for wealth production, and knowledge to create all the glue that's necessary to bond together the people who will become convinced that the Bras d'Or Lakes is the precious centre of their community. This symposium is a giant step in that direction. I hope you leave here ready to take the next giant step.

¹ Roseabeth Moss Kanter, *World Class: Thriving Locally in the Global Economy* 13