Envisioning Convergence

Cultural Conservation, Environmental Stewardship, & Sustainable Livelihoods

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Wolf, Keens & Company

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'Ulu (breadfruit)

'Ulu is the tree of life for many cultures worldwide. In old Hawai'i, 'ulu was valued for the raw materials it gifted. In addition to being a favorite food, 'ulu was used medicinally to heal skin conditions, relieve sciatica and treat headaches. The timber was used to construct canoes, buildings and everyday household goods. The milky gum was used to caulk canoes to make them watertight. Kapa (bark cloth) and cordage was created from the inner bark. The male inflorescences were used to create shades of yellow, tan and brown dyes.

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About This Report

In many ways, this publication (and the gathering on which it was based) pay homage to the work of some of the Fund for Folk Culture's grantees, including 'Ano 'ano Aloha, the California Indian Basketweavers Association, the Northern Forest Center, Nuestras Raices, and Tohono O'odham Community Action. Over the past several years, the FFC has seen these and other groups strive to develop holistic approaches in supporting the communities they serve – approaches in which cultural conservation, environmental stewardship, and economic development are viewed as a whole.

In November, 2003, we brought representatives from these organizations together with others from diverse backgrounds to discuss holistic approaches to cultural conservation, environmental stewardship, and sustainable livelihoods, and to identify the common concerns underlying the varied work of diverse fields. Present at the gathering were community activists and organizers, cultural practitioners, funders, policy makers, artists, economists, folklorists, environmentalists, and individuals steeped in community development. *Envisioning Convergence* chronicles much of that discussion, outlining the value of inclusive or holistic approaches, as well as the obstacles impeding their use (particularly in rural areas); providing a wealth of strategies for communities and organizations to enhance a climate of support; and recommending ideas for future action at the local, regional, and national levels. We offer it as a starting point for continued discussion.

As you read this report, you will notice threads of common ideas that run throughout, principles that we hope will guide such future discussion.

Bring Culture into Discussions of Sustainable Environmental and Economic Development Policy. Culture is the "glue," the shared values and meanings that bind us together, that shape our lives and, indeed, shape our attitudes about development and stewardship. Yet, it is this intangible dimension of culture that is frequently ignored in public policy discussion, where culture is too often seen as a "soft" topic or an impediment to progress, however that may be defined.

Redefine the Bottom Line. Real community well-being requires more than simple financial investment. There are multiple and sometimes competing bottom lines of value. The long-term vitality and viability of communities and habitat depend on broadening our sense of value, our units for measuring value, and our sense of time.

Develop Policies and Strategies that Integrate People and Place. This common-sense observation recognizes that the viability of cultural heritage, environment, and livelihood are tied to broader social, political, economic, technological, and environmental factors that are interdependent.

Recognize the Value of Local Knowledge and Ensure Meaningful Community Participation. Top down development and environmental policies which do not account for the communities affected are usually ineffective at best and destructive at their worst. Moreover, they waste opportunities to draw upon the creativity and wisdom of local residents and to harness this energy through democratic processes and practice.

The anthropologist Margaret Mead once remarked, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." At the Fund for Folk Culture, we have always believed in the power of gathering small groups together to share knowledge and resources, and to galvanize ideas for future action. We hope the efforts of this small group will be useful and inspiring to others, and we look forward to carrying this conversation forward with many partners.

Betsy Peterson
Executive Director
Fund for Folk Culture

Common Concerns

Open a newspaper today and you're bound to run across it – word of yet another rural community, its population ebbing and desperate for jobs, facing a Faustian bargain:

Tiny Harpswell, Maine (pop. 5,239) recently defeated a proposal that would have offered it a "financial lifeline," for example, but at incalculable cost. By erecting a $350 million natural gas processing plant on a nearby inlet off Casco Bay, two multinational energy companies would have brought the community several hundred short-term construction jobs and 50 long-term slots. But they would also have introduced huge tankers and underwater pipelines to the Maine coast's "narrow, rocky channels," threatening the area's chief industry, lobstering. As one of the hamlet's small businessmen explained his opposition, "I won't be displaced from my lobster bottom."[1]

The "clash of cultures, economic interests, and environmental concerns"[2] Harpswell faced is no longer an isolated experience, said more than fifty cultural practitioners, community and economic development representatives, economists, ethnographers, environmentalists, folklorists, and policy experts who gathered in Santa Fe, November 6-7, 2003.

The Fund for Folk Culture (FFC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the dynamic practice and conservation of folk and traditional arts

and culture in the United States through grantmaking, convening, and publications, brought this broad cross section of individuals together after watching a growing number of organizations, including some of its own grantees, striving to develop intersectional approaches to support community life and development in such instances. Knowing that many of these organizations were unaware of each other's work, the FFC saw an opportunity to host a forum where representatives from diverse fields might share information, concerns, and stories, and shape the beginnings of a common language and agenda for collective action. As those whom the Fund assembled in Santa Fe agreed, what happened to Harpswell, Maine is happening everywhere.[3]

The Global Situation

The depletion of resources and obliteration of culture are linked, and are rampant worldwide. "Cultures cannot survive if the environment on which they depend is laid waste or impoverished,"[4] the former Secretary-General of the United Nations Javier Perez de Cuellar warned in a 1995 call for action.

By 2025 the U.N. estimates world population will have climbed to eight billion, up from six billion in 2000. That will put enormous strain on water, energy, and other natural resources, given the agricultural expansion required to support such an increase. Ninety per cent of water drawn for human use now goes to agriculture, and about half of all wetlands have already been lost (as well as 20% of the world's 10,000 known freshwater species).[5]

As Jack Loeffler, a folklorist, radio producer, and conference participant, described the magnitude of the problem, "we will have eradicated much of the habitat [we need] before we've even started thinking about what kind of habitat it would take to sustain ten million of us in this country alone."

Reflected in Rural America

While U.S. cities have manifold problems, this world-wide crisis is most directly felt in our rural areas, where large tracts are under government control, and eking out a living has never been easy. Already the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service classifies many rural counties as "government-dependent" in citing factors that drive their economies (the others being farming, mining, manufacturing, services, and non-specialized).[6] Policy designations are even more illuminating: rural areas are "retirement destination counties, federal lands counties, commuting counties, persistent poverty counties, and transfer-dependent counties."[7] Growing numbers of migrant workers are settling in rural areas, where in the past they sought out

cities. Increasingly, rural communities are acknowledged to be under great stress, profoundly affected by urban centers and global markets.

Only one in five Americans lives in that landscape today, but the image of rural life continues to inspire our collective imagination. Why? In part because the cultural traditions of our diverse populations have their roots in rural experience. "The music, food, visual arts, folk tales, crafts, and other cultural manifestations of distinct rural groups have contributed profoundly to the larger American culture."[8] Even as chronic poverty grips generations of residents in our large rural regions, the nation continues to point to rural places as a source of such values as economic independence, just rewards for hard work, community cohesion, strong families, and close ties to the land. The rural U.S. is America's "field of dreams."

This disconnect between myth and reality is significant. Not only is it breeding a new culture of shame, of decline, of feeling left behind, as Stephen Blackmer, President of the Northern Forest Center reported; it also does not face the fact that strands in the fabric of American life are fraying almost beyond recognition. As Chuck Fluharty, Director of the Rural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri, remarked, "Rural hopelessness is stronger now than I've ever seen it."

The social inequity of some lives thriving at the expense of others, the degradation of the environment, the obliteration of species, and the accelerating threat of cultural extinctions along America's back roads are linked, said conference-goers. And the situation deserves our combined attention.

Above Left: Aerial view of sludge dam at Elk Run, West Virginia.

Above: "Big John," the dragline, loading rocks and dirt into two rock trucks at the Samples mountaintop removal site in Cabin Creek, West Virginia.

Left: Billboard erected as part of the West Virginia Coal Association's advertising campaign to counter criticisms of mountaintop removal mining and coal's deleterious effects on air and water quality.

Forces at Work in the Rural Environment

A number of dynamics are combining to create circumstances that render rural communities vulnerable. Some examples:

Global market forces are prompting shorter cycles of industrialization and de-industrialization, rendering once sturdy middle class enclaves continuously vulnerable.

The experience of Clinton, Virginia is typical – a town in transition, as people there put it, for half a century, as one set of jobs after another has vanished. "Coal-mining work dwindled with automation. Textiles decamped for Latin America. The county lured Nexus Communications, only to have it go bankrupt three years later in the dot.com implosion. A new day seemed at hand when online vacation company Travelocity signed a six-year lease to operate a call center in the abandoned Nexus building." Now it, too, is pulling out, routing its calls through India. "I've never worked harder to stay in the same place in my life," says Charles Yates, head of the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority.[9]

Power imbalances are draining communities of their assets.

At the conference Jack Loeffler recalled how the Hopi were induced not only to allow strip mining of their sacred sites, but also the use of precious Pleistocene water from their Black Mesa aquifer for a "slurry line" (a pipeline through which water is propelled) that would deliver the coal to a generating plant. The purpose? To provide Arizona with energy to pump water from the Colorado River, ostensibly for agriculture – environmentalists had rejected the idea of erecting dams at either end of the Grand Canyon.

At some point these resources will be depleted, as well as despoiled. Meanwhile only 25% of the power goes to central Arizona's fields. Too expensive for farmers, the rest lights up Las Vegas.

Native Americans have endured the inequity of such arrangements for generations. Now it is happening to others, as well. Tensions in managing the natural environment – between users of natural resources, like farmers and foresters, and those mainly interested in preserving natural amenities – are placing stress on rural communities,[10] *in particular. Power imbalances too often characterize these situations.*

People are finding themselves at the mercy of last-ditch options.

Attracting the proliferating detritus and least desirable elements of our economy – poultry farms, feed lots, waste dumps – is big business in rural America, said conference participants, even though most in some way degrade the local environment, growing the gap in the quality of life known by the very rich and the very poor.

"With 2.2 million people engaged in catching criminals and putting and keeping them behind bars, 'corrections' has become one of the largest sectors of the U.S. economy,"[11] *for example. Appalachian counties in Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky have sought out nine prisons, despite the fact that posting a sign outside a community describing it as home to a prison changes forever the community it was.*

The commercialization of values and culture that attend our growth economy are threatening our diverse traditions and languages with extinction.

Recently the law caught up with thieves who had been looting Death Valley National Park for five years, removing cultural artifacts of priceless archaeological value – pottery shards, clay figurines, basket fragments, hand-held grinding tools, pendants, even a human skull. "Archaeological crime has gone corporate," a resource coordinator for the Arizona State Museum in Tucson admitted. "A lot of the old stewards of the land were ranching families, but the economy forced them to sell."

"….Now the commercial looting companies are getting contracts and excavating the sites with bulldozers and backhoes….Entire pueblos, such as the 600-room Bailey Ruin, have been removed in recent months….And after a good year of rain, grasses come up and you'd never know anything was ever there."[12]

Elsewhere the plunder is more subtle: community traditions breaking down as people become more transient, forced to follow jobs; languages dying out as young people literally buy into mainstream culture. Only now are we beginning to recognize the value of wisdom regarding ecological relationships that is encoded in these languages, which, like the species they describe, risk extinction.[13]

Underlying Issues and Obstacles

Other factors pull otherwise complementary interests out of alignment, exacerbating rural America's problems.

Individual vs. group orientation

The American dream is one of rugged individualism, with the law enshrining it in matters of property as well as liberty.

Above: Head of Black Mesa Defense Fund Jack Loeffler (left) and President of Friends of the Earth David Brower (right) view a coal shovel at work at the bottom of the Black Mesa strip mine. The Black Mesa mine is operated by Peabody Coal Company on a lease of Navajo and Hopi Indian land of some 100 square miles. Black Mesa is sacred to both Hopi and Navajo people.

As building blocks of equity, individual land and fee simple home ownership make group or community ownership less attractive. "This whole country is built on property rights," as a conference participant pointed out, and owning a home, even a trailer, is "a powerful dream." Conventional economics also focus on the individual, not the collective.

Dominance of the western economic paradigm

The "western economic approach does not regard the world as alive, but rather, as a machine producing limitless resources,"[14] Sherry Salway Black, Senior Vice President of First Nations Development Institute, noted in a paper commissioned for the Santa Fe gathering. Corporations are propelled by the economic imperative of turning habitat into money, which threatens the environment by favoring short-term exploitation over long-term stewardship. They also tend towards growth and consolidation, aggregating to the few and usually non-local. Market forces thus create patterns that render many vulnerable.

Conference participants agreed that small "c" capitalism and markets offer useful mechanisms for sustainable livelihoods if they're managed in a sophisticated manner. But they acknowledged that small, vital operations often have difficulty with the forces of consolidation. Globally, the long-term prospects are not good: the U.N. reports that for now declining food prices are benefiting consumers and improving nutrition in developing countries, but the trend is unsustainable over the long term because the potential to expand crop production is limited and threatens other ecosystems.[15]

Silo approaches & the fragmented nature of policy-making and funding

"The U.S.D.A. is the only federal institution focused exclusively on rural concerns, but a huge range of federal, regional, state, and local agencies is also involved and uses "an equally diverse range of criteria to determine service regions and eligibility for government action," Dee Davis, President of the Center for Rural Strategies in Whitesburg, Kentucky, and a conference participant, writes in "A Rural Perspective." "Indeed 'rural policy' could just as easily be written in the plural; it is the aggregate of dozens of different agencies' guidelines and initiatives so that understanding it is akin to assembling a jigsaw puzzle."[16]

Silo approaches also impede cooperative efforts. The jargon of academic disciplines and the tendency of many academics to dismiss community-based knowledge, the propensity of public and private funders to stake out narrow areas of focus, tensions between the theoretical and the practical, and the territorial nature of research – all contribute to the problem.

Misperception, skepticism, and inertia

"Rural people and places in America are poorly understood and largely neglected by the people who write, speak, and thereby influence attitudes about social problems and public policy,"[17] another participant, Emery Castle, Director Emeritus of the Rural Studies Program at Oregon State University in Corvallis, notes in The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places. *As Davis points out, "the dominant perception is that rural America equals farming," but it's not true: "manufacturing and service have a far greater impact on the economic health of most rural communities than does farming." Moreover, "important differences exist in economic structures, race and ethnicity, and finally, cultures."[18]*

For some residents of rural areas, lack of experience with small-scale democracy, of having a say in one's own future, creates debilitating cycles of dependency. As a participant explained, "What we have are people who might want to change and realize something is wrong, but have lost the ability and optimism – the capacity."

The pace and dichotomies of change

"The major problem facing individuals and communities in a rapidly changing world is that of promoting and adjusting to equitable change without denying the valuable elements in traditions,"[19] Javier Perez de Cuellar has suggested. And the dynamics of progress are such that adapting is almost a daily necessity.

Change creates incongruities of gain and loss, as conference participants noted repeatedly. Children of Navajo families who protested the strip mining of Black Mesa in the 1970s are now drag-line operators. As members of the mineworkers union, they make good wages, and many are anti-environmentalist – "the final irony," as one noted.

As another asked, "How do you reconcile such conflicting absolutes?" "That's the heart of it."

Profile: Angelo Joaquin, Jr.
The Consequences of Cultural Loss

So pervasive is culture that we rarely see it at work in our lives. Angelo Joaquin, Jr. was surprised to find how little he appreciated his heritage as a Tohono O'odham (Desert People) when he traveled to Washington, D. C. in 1980 with his father's *waila* band, The Joaquin Brothers. Their performance at the 42nd National Folk Festival was negotiated by Angelo, who also served as spokesperson for the band.

For the first time in his life, he "didn't feel strange and out of place" mingling among almost 250 fellow dancers and musicians – Appalachian step dancers, Cajuns, people from Nova Scotia. Watching and listening, he recalls thinking how much cultures hold in common, especially after "about thirty of us got together one night and talked about the role music plays when someone dies." He also remembers realizing how much there is to learn.

Anthropologists speak of culture as a set of beliefs, ideas, understandings, and traditions that are handed down from one generation to another. Joaquin, Jr. suggests it is more subtle than that. It's true that the Tohono O'odham *Himdag* (teachings on how to live your life) describe plants and animals as being equal to humans, worthy of profound respect, and of all life becoming another kind of energy at death, so that the remains of all life forms must be accorded the respect they're given in life. But as Angelo describes the way Native Americans deal with the onslaughts of change and outside influence, culture is a kind of protective filter, a process of revising and balancing, almost organic in nature.

"Today we have at our fingertips a lot of information from the internet," he points out. "What heartens me is how the O'odham nation brings in elders to help young people understand it." Classrooms are moved to the desert so that students can learn how to use their senses in considering why one kind of soil is better for making pots, or why a particular genus of tree attracts animals. "Traditional knowledge fills in around the scientific. They enlarge each other. It's a meld."

We absorb such new information according to our experiences and systems of belief, says Joaquin, Jr., describing how differently two communities view a memorial on his reservation. He grew up believing the "Children's Shrine" sits on the site of "a hole in the ground that suddenly started spewing water, flooding all the desert villages," and that it honors four children who were offered as a sacrifice, on the advice of medicine people, to end the flood.

In contrast, Anglo farmers living along the northern edge of the reservation think the story involves three young people rather than four, and a drought, not a flood. "For them not enough water is the issue," notes Joaquin, Jr.,

Below: Tohono O'odham farmer examining corn.

"while for Desert People, too much water is a catastrophe." The differing numbers reflect differing frameworks of belief, four being a sacred number for many southwestern Native Americans and three being a common symbolic number in Christianity and many Anglo-European cultures. Place gives rise to viewpoint.

As adaptive as it is, culture shouldn't be threatened by "progress" – so long as traditions still thrive. Satellite TV dishes cropping up in villages doesn't worry Joaquin, Jr. He simply asks, "Are the ceremonies still taking place? Are prayers still being offered?" However, when traditions are obliterated, so is the psychological resiliency they provide for individuals and communities.

He offers a stark example in the loss of the "Salt Run," the ritual by which a young O'odham traditionally moved from boyhood to manhood, before borders between the U. S. and Mexico were drawn and the O'odham nation still stretched to the Sea of Cortez.

A young man would run all day for days, stopping in the evening for ceremonies and rest at a camp set up by elders. Says Joaquin, Jr.: "Imagine what it must have been like for a Desert Person accustomed to only seeing a lot of water during rainy seasons, after being physically stressed for so long, to finally stand before water stretching as far as the eye can see!" En route home, he would collect salt, collected and hardened among the dunes farther inland, as a token of his passage. "But today we no longer have that ritual of transition," he laments. "Now gangs do it. Sadly, they're often perceived to be the ones who offer ways for young boys to become a man."

[1] Juliet Eilperin, "Maine Community Beats Back Big Oil," Washington *Post* 13 Mar. 2004: A3.
[2] Eilperin.
[3] Elsewhere in the same edition of the *Post*, reporter Blaine Harden describes "one of the emptier places in the United States" – Valley County, Montana – in an article titled "The Snow is Just the Latest Plague," and speaks of "an accelerating demographic [that] is shuttering public schools, strangling the economy, and stealing the future in parts of 10 states running from central Texas to northern Montana." (A5).
[4] Javier Perez de Cuellar, *Our Creative Diversity* (Paris: UNESCO, 1995) 17.
[5] "Global Challenge, Global Opportunity: Trends in Sustainable Development," Meeting Summary, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 26 Aug. – 4 Sept. 2002, 15 Sept. 2004 <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/critical-trends_1408.pdf>.
[6] Dee Davis and Tim Marema, "A Rural Perspective" (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Center for Rural Strategies, 2002) 4.
[7] Davis and Marema 5.
[8] Davis and Marema 4.
[9] Carol Morello, "Jobs Depart, Hope Lingers," Washington *Post*, 9 Mar. 2004: A13.
[10] Emery Castle, ed. *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995) 5.
[11] Alan Elsner, "America's Prison Habit," Washington *Post*, 16 Feb. 2004: Op-Ed page.
[12] Ryan Slattery, "In Las Vegas, Looting Ring Unravels," Washington *Post*, 15 Mar. 2004: A2.
[13] Scott Slovic, "Gary Paul Nabhan: A Portrait," *Cross Pollinations: The Marriage of Science and Poetry*, Gary Paul Nabhan (New York: Counterpoint, 1997) 83.
[14] Sherry Salway Black, "Native Assets: Controlling Our Futures," (Commissioned paper, the Fund for Folk Culture, 2003) 11.
[15] Global Challenge, Global Opportunity: Trends in Sustainable Development 7-9.
[16] Davis and Marema 9.
[17] Castle 3.
[18] Davis and Marema 2.
[19] de Cuellar 18.

Promising Trends

While those who gathered in Santa Fe described circumstances of common and urgent concern, they also pointed to trends that give cause for hope – if we can summon the will to build on them.

These trends suggest that both experts and communities realize that our economic growth and development paradigm, which promote the maximization of production and consumption using nonrenewable resources, "are widening gaps between rich and poor, increasing poverty, degrading the environment, destroying societies and cultures, and sapping the human spirit."[1] In response, they are spearheading efforts to offset such bleak impacts by reinvigorating local control, slowing the rate at which resources are used, or rethinking what constitutes "value."

Businesses are creating new value via sustainable practices.

At the global level "regulatory pressure, social activism, and consumer preferences have encouraged producers and marketers to provide a range of sustainably-produced forest products, including timber, coffee, and fruit."[2] In paying twice the market price for coffee to a Mexican farmers' co-op, for example, and displaying "Fair Trade Certified" seals on its packages to offer proof that it paid a living wage to the growers, Vermont's Green Mountain Coffee Roasters joins many other businesses supporting the Fair Trade movement.

Above: A Hmong gardener participates in an Extension effort to help Hmong immigrants become established in Minnesota. Circa 1980, Dakota County, Twin Cities area.

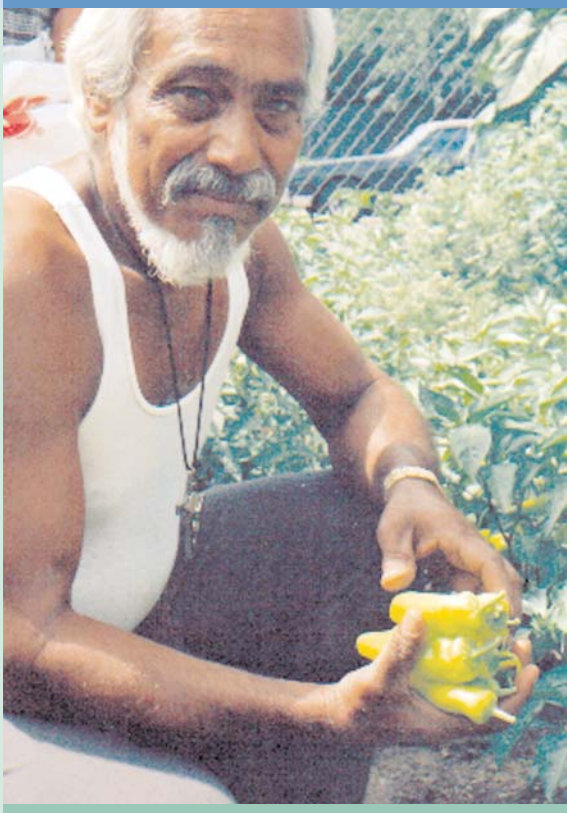
Small scale examples are also abundant. Renewing the Countryside, a nonprofit headquartered in Minnesota, maintains a web site[3] that showcases people working to enhance their rural communities and regions. Among 160 examples currently listed is a solar greenhouse that uses recycled sink and shower water to irrigate its plants. *For more information on such projects, including how to become involved in Renewing the Countryside's Story Project, visit www.renewingthecountryside.org.*

More countries are moving to establish protected areas.

The U.N. reports that "to protect natural ecosystems and biodiversity and the services they provide, countries are increasingly establishing nature reserves, national parks, and wildlife sanctuaries."[4] Many of these reserves are providing the basis for the rapidly growing eco-tourism industry, which can finance their maintenance and provide employment.

In the past decade the U.S. has seen a growing number of heritage tourism initiatives join national parks as such attractive tourist destinations. They bring parks, arts organizations and development agencies together. The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative is one of about two dozen national heritage areas now working to preserve and maintain both cultural and natural resources. A partnership of over ten agencies spearheaded by the North Carolina Arts Council, it spans North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia. And there are likely to be more soon, as they provide an appealing way to work with urban, as well as rural, communities. Rivers of Steel,[6] in southwestern Pennsylvania,

runs programs related to the region's historic role as Steel Making Capital of the World for 100 years, for example.



People are formulating new measures of progress.

Midway through the 20th century, people began to realize the System of National Accounts, GNP, GDP, and other leading economic indicators do not capture the entire picture of human welfare. Early alternatives incorporated social factors by adding the value of unpaid and household production. But by the late 1970s, post-economic policy tools were proliferating, as well – environmental impact statements, social impact assessments, technology assessments, and employment impact assessments, among them. As economies worsened in the 1980s, budget deficits, high interest rates, unemployment and trade balances were increasingly seen as the real metrics.

The U.N. has consistently sought to institute alternative indicators of progress for development. In the 1970s it proposed the Basic Human Needs indicator, which focused on how well nations are meeting the needs of their poorest citizens. More recently, literacy, life expectancy, infant mortality, purchasing power, human freedom, and environmental damage have become measures.

Many in the U.S. now recognize concepts of "blended value" – that is, economic, social, and environmental value as one seamless whole that cannot be disaggregated – and are promoting new indicators. The nonprofit Redefining Progress works with a broad array of partners to shift the economy and public policy towards sustainability as the over-riding value, for example. In 1991 a volunteer group formulated measures for the city of Seattle that included "air quality, percentage of children living in poverty, wild salmon runs, biodiversity, renewable energy generated, and percentage of the population that used the library or donated blood, among other things."[7] The Northern Forest Center has crafted a similar "wealth index" for northern New York and New England.

The value of formal indices is considerable. As a child development expert noted in suggesting we have a CWI – a child well-being index similar to

the GNP – what such indices do is "inspire larger cultural shifts in the way Americans respond to problems, such as teenage pregnancy."[8]

Increasingly the frame for looking at economic and community development is one of region, community, and place.

"The old race to the bottom doesn't work in economic development anymore," Chuck Fluharty told the Santa Fe gathering. "Now there are institutional intermediaries." In fact, the international Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, based in France, already understands that policy makers need to move from looking at sector to looking at place, and has begun working on a governance structure that will encourage government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to work together in that frame.

The nonprofit sector is also carving out complementary approaches. Since 1994, the Ford Foundation has invested $20 million in the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), designed to help community colleges "develop their impoverished regions by improving access to higher education, and by offering training in strategic planning and team building through a Leadership Institute."[9] The Kellogg Foundation's Leadership for Community Change focuses on "the common good" in building local leadership capacity.

As conference-goers suggested, all of these trends are good news for the rural communities that dot the U. S. countryside. The challenge is to connect these various approaches, share information, and bring the good news to more of them.

Nuestras Raices, Inc.,

Holyoke, Massachusetts

With support from several foundations including the Fund for Folk Culture's Partnerships in Local Culture program, underwritten by the Ford Foundation, Nuestras Raices, Inc., a grassroots community organization promoting sustainable development, established the Plaza of the Centro Agrícola. The Plaza is modeled after the town centers of Puerto Rico and Latin America, and hosts outdoor events such as flower shows, music events, and festivals. The project has developed food and agricultural micro-enterprises in Holyoke's Latino community, establishing certified kitchen facilities and greenhouses, and a horticultural mentoring program for youth growing traditional Latino specialty crops. El Jardin Bakery, featuring organic ingredients and a brick wood-fired oven, and La Plaza Restaurant, serving Puerto Rican and American cuisine, draw from the community garden's harvest, and support the preservation and advancement of Puerto Rican cultural heritage. To learn more about Nuestras Raices, visit www.nuestras-raices.org.

Above Left: Jose "El Indio" Rodriguez shows off peppers from his garden.

Left: Christian Nieves and Edwin Velasquez display lettuce to be sold at the farmers' market.

Right: Youth from the Holyoke Boys and Girls Club planting their garden on a nice spring day.

Right: A view of the *Centro Agricola* center for micro-enterprise and community building. The *Centro Agricola* is home to five businesses: *La Plaza* Restaurant, *El Jardin* Bakery, *Sofrito El Cielo, Borinquella* Catering, and the *Nuestras Raices* Greenhouse - and a variety of community activities, educational programs, festivals, youth programming, and more.

Bioregional Thinking: Promoting a Holistic View

"Bioregional" thinking, now about twenty years old, complements all of this inclusive, intersectional work. It recognizes that problems occurring in one place in a large region (say, a specific watershed) may have further ramifications in one or more other parts (i. e., "downstream effects")."[10] *But it also goes a lot further as a system of thought, as a conference participant explained. The bioregionalist says, "When you look at the environment, you [must] also look at culture in the environment and the level of reciprocity." Thus, bioregionalism not only embraces ecological concerns, but also ponders social, cultural, economic, and political issues.*[11] *It wishes to move away from our looking at land as being either a piece of "real estate" or a mere resource base.*

"Bioregionalism serves to ground environmental thought in the real circumstances of everyday life. It demands that people connect their livelihood to their sense of place. Whether it be an experiment in community technology, sustainable agriculture, urban forestry, permaculture, or restoration ecology, or the simple, practical idea of home recycling, these practices represent hands-on environmentalism, the everyday dirty work that allows communities to collaborate, to experiment, and to develop a collective ecological identity."[12]

Profile: Sharon Clarke
Reversing the Trend of African American Land Loss

Along the Carolina coasts, loss of land has meant loss of culture and community for many African Americans. "Successive generations live on shared property. Land was and continues to be passed on as a kind of commons. It is part of the culture that binds people into communities," says Sharon Clarke, a folklorist and Cultural Projects Manager for The Conservation Fund's North Carolina office.

"Each heir has the rights to a share of the whole, but no one person has a deed to a specific portion," she notes. "That practice leads to problems that often result in the loss of the land and fragmentation of communities of all sizes, small and large, rural and urban."

In the land-based cultures and economies of the Southeast, land ownership was the key to personal, economic, and cultural power. Owning one's self and the land one worked were important keys to economic prosperity and maintaining cultural traditions. After the Civil War, newly freed African Americans valued land for more than its economic worth: ownership brought them autonomy and self-suffiency. Land ownership is the reason for maintaining treasured customs, too. With ownership come lessons about stewardship like learning how to turn what looks to most like a weed, into a cough remedy or salve to soothe a burn.

The causes of African American land loss are complex, but there are recognizable patterns of discrimination and intimidation. Even with proper legal documentation, valued land is targeted for sewage treatment plants, military installations, roads, or businesses that bring promise, but not always the reality of new, better jobs, etc. Unintended consequences can be just as destructive and the problems are not always from outside. Failure to prepare wills or deeds, family disagreements, and misunderstandings are also factors in loss of family owned lands.

Coastal wetlands that were avoided are now considered valuable by outsiders wanting waterfront vacation homes. The environmental movement shares some responsibility for pushing people off their land as well, by urging

preservation over sustained conservation in already inhabited communities and by not listening to the accumulated knowledge of generations. Clarke notes, "The environmental challenges are not just about the so-called 'environmental racism' associated with industrial sites, some of it has to do with the elitist culture of the environmental movement. Working landscapes are being replaced by leisure landscapes. The transformation results in the loss of cultural knowledge and communities."

Working with The Conservation Fund, some African American communities are beginning to explore the ways in which their cultural traditions are linked to natural resources and using that to strengthen their communities for the future. The prospects are daunting but many rural communities are facing the challenge and seeking new solutions to economic and cultural prosperity. Some are even making plans to regain land that has been lost.

Above Right: Ociea Hill of Creswell, Washington County, North Carolina sows seed for a fall crop of collard greens.

Above: Quilt by Eliza Liverman, Tyrrell County, North Carolina. She is the mother of Ociea Hill.

[1] Sherry Salway Black, "Redefining Success in Community Development: A New Approach for Determining and Measuring the Impact of Development" (The Richard Schramm Paper on Community Development, Lincoln Filene Center at Tufts University, 1994) 2.a

[2] Margot Roosevelt, "The Coffee Clash," *Time*: Bonus Section: *Inside Business*, April, 2004.

[3] www.renewingthecountryside.org.

[4] "Global Challenge, Global Opportunity: Trends in Sustainable Development," Meeting Summary, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 26 Aug. – 4 Sept. 2002, 15 Sept. 2004 <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/criticaltrends_1408.pdf>.

[5] The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative was awarded a 2004 Preserve America Preservation Award for Heritage Tourism by *Preserve America*, a new White House initiative in cooperation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the U. S. Department of the Interior, the U. S. Department of Commerce, the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. It promotes four groups of trails: Blue Ridge Music; Cherokee Heritage; Craft Heritage; and Gardens and Countryside. For more see www.preserveamerica.gov .

[6] See www.riversofsteel.com .

[7] Black 7.

[8] Laura Session Stepp, "Baby Steps Made in Well-Being of Children, Data Show," Washington *Post*, 25 Mar. 2004: A1. One such index – Kids Count – already exists on the internet. Developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, www.aecf.org/kidscount/ is a web-based data project that tracks national and state by state census-related data about the status of children and develops benchmarks of child well-being for use by policy makers and others.

[9] Lynn Barnett, "Community Colleges Help Bridge Rural Economic Divide," *Community College Times*, 5 Feb. 2002: 1.

[10] Joel Russ, "A Bioregional Perspective on Planning and Regional Economics," *The Trumpeter*, 12.3 (1995) 1, 17 Sept. 2004 <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v12.3/russ.html>

[11] Russ 2.

[12] Mitchell Thomashow, *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) 63.

Envisioning a Commons

Before they convened in Santa Fe, conference participants received several papers examining situations in rural America where the impact of current trends, both positive and negative, can clearly be seen. And that impact is profound. A paper by Sherry Salway Black, of the First Nations Development Institute, described the community of the Tohono O'odham (Desert People) in Arizona's Sonoran desert. As an illustration of the possible end game of dynamics at work in the larger landscape, what happened to the Tohono O'odham in the "commons" of their shared land, resources, and heritage presents an alarming – and ultimately an encouraging – prospect.

An Emblematic Example

Until the last half of the 20th century, the Tohono O'odham were almost entirely self sufficient, employing 1,000-year old agricultural practices. As late as the 1920s, they were still cultivating over 20,000 acres in the floodplain of the Sonoran lowlands. But by 1949, it was only 2,500 acres, and until a few years ago it was thought to be less than ten. The causes for the decline are complex – misguided federal control efforts; a lack of labor, thanks to federal work programs and the World War II military draft; the disruption of social and cultural continuity brought on by children being forcibly placed in boarding schools; and the introduction of processed foods through federal food programs.[1]

Quite simply, said Black, the Tohono O'odham (Desert People) lost control of their assets – not only their land and its resources, but also the livelihood in which their lives were steeped with meaning. The knowledge and experience, and the skills, customs, social relations and networks that for millennia had supported their livelihood languished, too, with devastating results. "In a similar litany heard throughout Indian Country,"[2] per capita income among the Tohono O'odham is now $3,113, compared with $14,000 nationally; over 65.7% of the population is below the poverty line, compared with 13.1% nationally; and 62.7% are unemployed. Moreover, more than 50% of *all* adults have adult-onset diabetes – the highest rate in the world – and children as young as seven have the disease.[3]

The loss of the traditional food system – of raising *bawi* (tepary beans), *hun* (O'odham sixty-day corn), *ha:l* (O'odham squash) and *ke:li ba:so* (Old Man's Chest melon) – is cited as the most significant factor in creating these social problems: "it supported the local economy, maintained the people's physical well-being, and provided the material foundation of Tohono O'odham culture."[4] A move to reinstate the food system and the diet it affords may well offer a way back from this wholesale devastation, however. In the fall of 2003, Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA), a grassroots community organization located in Sells, Arizona and dedicated to creating positive programs[5] based in the O'odham *Himdag* – the Desert People's Way – drew over 100 people to celebrate a Harvest Feast of these foods, grown on a down payment of eighteen acres. Traditional dancers sought a blessing, and elders shared memories for the first time in generations.

Ultimately, success in revitalizing traditional Tohono O'odham agriculture will not – and should not – be measured solely in economic terms, Black cautioned. The "re-establishment of a wine ceremony and singing a particular song, neither of which had occurred in decades, is a significant impact. Providing access to foods that return good health and keep diseases like diabetes at bay is a significant impact. [And] the leadership at TOCA and in the community necessary to sustain these efforts is a significant impact."[6]

Opposite Page: Tohono O'odham elder Frances Manuel winnows corn. Ms. Manuel is working with TOCA on a book about traditional foods, including their cultural significance, nutritional qualities and hands-on information about their production.

Above Left: TOCA farm manager Noland Johnson inspects a field of tepary beans. The most heat and drought tolerant bean crop in the world, tepary beans are both culturally and nutritionally important to the Tohono O'odham.

Above: *Bahidag* – the fruit of the Saguaro cactus – plays a central role in the traditional Tohono O'odham rain ceremony. Each year, TOCA sponsors a *bahidaj* harvest camp where elders teach young people about this and other cultural traditions.

Within the Embrace of Culture

"The story of TOCA and its Harvest Feast exemplifies the intersection of developing 'sustainable livelihoods, cultural integrity, and environmental stewardship,'" Black suggested.[7] The story of the Tohono O'odham's decline and efforts to spearhead a turnaround also clearly reveal the role culture plays in maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual life, and the potential that can be unleashed in recognizing how relationships with the environment and any livelihood one seeks to practice fall within culture's embrace.

Culture is an asset, a "building block of wealth,"[8] as surely as land, labor, and capital. As conference participants noted repeatedly, seeing the fine arts, traditional arts, crafts, and festivals as culture mistakes its true scope and nature. All are manifestations of culture, not culture itself. It is culture that connects everything. Language, for example, links people to the natural world – in their naming of fellow life forms, in the knowledge they accumulate using such names to record experiences in their habitats, and in the beliefs they reflect – particularly stories about how life came to be. "Land is a text, [both] read and written," and America a vast expanse of "shaped places, synthetic in their mix of natural space and human custom."[9]

As a second paper by Mary Hufford, Director for the Center for Folklore and Ethnography at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, reported, place names indicate how language links us both to environments and livelihoods, as can be seen "in the region where West Virgina, Kentucky, and Tennessee converge"[10] and ginseng (a root highly valued for its medicinal properties) is harvested. Names like Seng Branch, Sang Creek, and Three-Prong Hollow "don't necessarily indicate the presence of ginseng," wrote Hufford, "but [one] can infer that ginseng has been relatively prominent in conversation there."[11]

Notions of habitat inspire a system of values, ultimately building a sense of "ecological identity."[12] In the coastal Carolinas, it was said, hunting is the way people learn conservation and ecology – that if you don't have certain trees on riverbanks or in watersheds, you won't have what's necessary to sustain deer and bears. What is striking about those who harvest ginseng, Hufford noted, is how they derive identity from growing up "digging roots and gathering herbs."[13] As one man told her, "I work in construction, but I really consider myself a ginsenger."[14] From an entirely different landscape a Hopi elder explained to Jack Loeffler, author of the third paper, that "you think about this place, and you know that not only are you connected to it. All Hopis that ever lived or died are connected to it, and you have a sense of it that is totally profound. We can articulate that connection to hundreds, if not thousands of points in the landscape."[15]

This sense of interconnectedness, of spirituality, is increasingly viewed as being vital to human resiliency and livelihoods that can sustain people.[16] It is also the driving force in motivating people to do something about the ecological crisis. Culture manifests itself as the power of understanding linkage: "the capacity to 'manage' landscape for wild ginseng requires an ecological imagination, [for example], where facets of community life are measured in relationship to one another."[17] Similarly, the Tohono O'odham (Desert People) believe that "wellness is a balance of physical, mental, and spiritual health," that one must strive for balance in one's life.[18] When such cultural knowledge and belief are disparaged, the toll on all dimensions of individual and community well-being can be dramatic, as the Tohono O'odham experience proves.

For some, the specific historical and cultural circumstances of Native experience and stake-holding may not seem applicable to the general American countryside, where the "commons" of people, culture and land are less obvious. Nor can it be said that "Native American cultures consistently live in harmony and balance among themselves, or are always a benign presence within their habitats," as Loeffler pointed out. But "their heritages remain rooted in their collective recognition of the sacred quality of the landscape,"[19] in the importance of culture and a commitment to a "commons."

Where commons are destroyed, it "erases local and regional publics that form around a shared stake in a resource," as Hufford reported. "While communities may continue to exist around the loss of the resource (for example, families that hold reunions near the sites of homeplaces condemned to create Great Smoky Mountain National Park), the basis for participation in the larger polity has shifted."[20] "Even if communities continue to form around the ensuing experience of exile, such a public is considerably weakened by the loss of its resource."[21]

The lesson for all is that economic development must start with people, which is to say, culture. "Development divorced from its human or cultural context is growth without soul," as Javier Perez de Cuellar reminds us. But "this is not a view commonly held. A more conventional view regards culture as either a help or a hindrance to economic development, leading to the call to take 'cultural factors into account in development.'"[22] A new development paradigm, one that is based on a worldview and knowledge (i.e., culture) and the full range of shared assets (i.e., a commons) "may [thus]," as Black suggested, "help not only Native people, but others as well."[23]

Opposite Page: Traditional singing and dancing is a central part of the O'odham *Himdag* – the Desert People's Lifeways. Here traditional dancers bless the ground at TOCA's traditional *ak chin* farm. *Ak chin* is a a type of flood water farming.

Above Right: Historic drawing of ginseng, originally appearing in the U.S. Agricultural Bulletin, 1892.

Above: Joe Williams, ginsenging in Tom's Hollow, near Whitesville, West Virginia.

Shared Values

Working from diverse perspectives and backgrounds, conference participants described a handful of shared core values that inform the holistic approaches to which they are committed. All aspire to some form of balance.

Reciprocity

Continued existence depends on nurturing continued co-existence, they suggested, understanding that "all things are related and interconnected, that the entire world is alive."[24] They described "exchange systems" by which people obligate themselves to insure their futures as a manifestation of such understanding: "trust and an expectation of reciprocity are the glue that makes social capital arrangements possible."[25] The point is to acknowledge interdependency, and to build mutuality with all forms of life.

Local autonomy

To take advantage of local knowledge, control must be local. And it, too, must be a balancing process. Since culture is dynamic, not static, a "community must take on the responsibility to reflect on its cultural values and decide whether to operate out of those values or out of dominant market values," as a participant phrased it.

Inclusiveness

Whether a state forest or a historic site, a "commons" is a resource on which a large public draws, yet much of that public is only dimly aware of policies governing its use. Fewer still have a voice in policy-making. Archie Green, a folklorist, labor historian, and conference participant, noted how rarely unionized workers are represented in discussions about economic development, though they might be said to be on the "front lines" of coal mining, logging, and the like. Fair representation is also a necessary form of balance.

Far sightedness

Achieving sustainability is the ultimate balancing act. Popularized by the U.N.'s Brundtland Commission of 1983, "sustainability" calls for "a form of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Among Native Americans the rule of thumb is to "consider the consequences on the seventh generation."[26]

Below: Ginseng drying in a window, Naoma, West Virginia.

Concepts of the Commons

The Tohono O'odham's (Desert People's) experience illustrates how pervasive culture is in encoding our understanding of the natural world. In addition, it exemplifies a commons – a nexus of interests that, with the land and resources those interests spring from, form common wealth in which all members have a stake.

The term commons derives from the period about 500 years ago when much of the land in England and Europe was held in common, and courts recognized the right of ordinary people to graze cattle or grow crops as a property right. In a project of massive social engineering, however, Parliament passed the Enclosure Acts, stripping commoners of these rights and delivering the lands to individual, usually wealthy, landowners. By 1895, about a half of one percent of the population of England and Wales owned 99% of the land. Land became a commodity – real estate."[27]

In the U.S. today the term commons is employed in discussing several related concepts. To many the commons includes social institutions,[28] *or social capital, as well as property – here "a commons of ginseng patches, elsewhere a lake, a species of game animal, a public street or park,"*[29] *as Hufford explained. A commons is deemed to be a boundary we tend, like the fence of Robert Frost's poem "The Mending Wall," something shared that "both relates and separate us."*[30]

A commons is also viewed as the right of "communities [to manage] their shared property for the benefit of all, as a civic entitlement, managing for the common good, not just for the corporate good," and being about ensuring popular enfranchisement, not granting privileges according to one's ability to pay or invest."[31] *The new commons of the internet, for example, is seen as a valuable resource for wealth-creation for all, and moves to "enclose" it through copyright and other means is prompting heated debates like those stimulated by attempts to subject public lands to commercial exploitation.*

Many see "the goal of the commons [as being] to preserve the social and moral integrity of a given resource or social community," and a vehicle for democracy, in that "we become a public through practices of tending the resources in which we have a shared stake."[32]

Profile: Doris Dyen – A Cultural Frame for Sustainable Development and Environmental Reclamation: Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area

Describing the long line of ethnic groups that have settled in southwestern Pennsylvania, Doris Dyen hints at the wealth of cultural assets on which the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, of which she is Director of Cultural Conservation, can draw.

"Waves of immigrants have come here to mine coal and forge steel – first the English and Scots-Irish, then the Germans and Irish," she explains. "After the Civil War, it was Eastern and Southern Europeans – Poles, Slovaks, Croatians, and Italians, along with Roma (Gypsies), Jews, and others who never had a homeland. Through the 19th century African Americans came, first by way of the Underground Railroad to freedom, and later, in the Great Northern Migration, seeking the promise of industrial jobs." Now overlays of Asians and Latin Americans have added their strata to the cultural ecology of rural counties surrounding Pittsburgh, as well as that of the city itself.

"This whole region became an industrial organism," Dyen says. "Seven counties were reconfigured to serve the purposes of industry, so people, the environment, natural resources, and economic output were all tied together." When the area "lost steel," everything was threatened – not just the economic base, but also the area's sense of identity. Losing corporations was like losing a "big brother," and losing work meant losing the culture and community of the workplace.

For the past twenty years mill towns, coal towns, and even Pittsburgh itself have all gone through countless "imaging exercises," she reports, all looking to the future. As she explains, "The economic imperative is of over-riding importance. What is or is not sustainable, and issues surrounding that question, are front and center."

What is now catalyzing more grounded activity is the recognition that "if you forget steel, you lose the base from which everything has evolved," as Dyen puts it. "If you don't incorporate that story into whatever comes, you lose identity

altogether." This realization is prompting vital dialogue on a number of fronts: consideration of which buildings to save and which to tear down; what to do with brownfields (vacant contaminated properties where industrial buildings formerly stood), once industry's impact has been remediated; and how to handle the potential wastes of new industries, for starters. "It is galvanizing people," says Dyen. "Zoning is a big deal here, the pivot on which differing views turn. Some people want to have greenways along the river, while others want to attract new industry so that life will be like it was before."

Meanwhile, cultural practices tied to the rivers are reappearing and new ones are gaining importance. Pittsburgh has been in the business of reclamation for over forty years, Dyen points out, ever since the Donora Smog of 1948 provided "a big wakeup call," so the area's rivers are again attracting people. The Chinese community – primarily white-collar professionals, many of whom are recent immigrants, she notes – now hold annual dragon boat (rowing) races on the Monongahela. "Their tradition requires water, and they now have both the clean water and the critical mass of people to carry on the tradition."

Heritage areas are conceived to embody and promote holistic approaches that can lead to a kind of community healing, suggests Dyen. They "unite sustainable development and environmental reclamation, and highlight culture. They find ways to utilize culture to propel revitalization," she says. "You don't find heritage areas developing where everything is fine to begin with."

Under Dyen's leadership, Rivers of Steel recently published *Routes to Roots*, a driving guide to the Heritage Area which includes the churches that hold festivals and the mom-and-pop stores like Vibo's Bakery that provide a reason for people to get in their cars and go exploring on a beautiful Saturday afternoon. Tourism is now the second largest sector of Pennsylvania's economy, outranked only by agriculture. Dyen knows the effect the driving guide will have on small-town citizens: "If they know people are coming, they'll see the need to have signage and regular hours, and to articulate what makes them special."

The ideas that prompt heritage areas, whether codified in formal structures or not, are best spread to others close by, Dyen believes. "People really seem most comfortable talking with those with whom they already feel some kind of connection." Regions are a workable framework: "We try not to think of driving more than two hours from home as a rule of thumb," she says. "If you have to go farther, you've gone 'somewhere else' – people won't consider you one of them."

[1] Sherry Salway Black, "Native Assets: Controlling Our Futures," (Commissioned paper, the Fund for Folk Culture, 2003) 3.
[2] Black 2.
[3] Black 2.
[4] Black 3.
[5] TOCA's programs include a focus on cultural preservation, community health, outreach to youth and elders, and preservation of the language, among other activities.
[6] Black 15.
[7] Black 1.
[8] Black 4-5.
[9] William Howarth, "Land and Word: American Pastoral," *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places*, ed. Emery Castle (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995) 27.
[10] Mary Hufford, "Wild Ginseng, Ethnography, and the Democratic Prospect," (Commissioned paper, the Fund for Folk Culture, 2003) 8.
[11] Hufford 8.
[12] Mitchell Thomashow, *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995) 68.
[13] Hufford 6.
[14] Hufford 6.
[15] Jack Loeffler, "In Celebration of Landforms, Waterways, and the Local Deities," (Commissioned paper, the Fund for Folk Culture, 2003) 5.
[16] Sherry Salway Black, "Redefining Success in Community Development: A New Approach for Determining and Measuring the Impact of Development," (The Richard Schramm Paper on Community Development, Lincoln Filene Center at Tufts University, 1994) 24.
[17] Hufford 9.
[18] Black 20.
[19] Loeffler 9.
[20] Hufford 7.
[21] Hufford 12.
[22] Javier Perez de Cuellar, *Our Creative Diversity* (Paris: UNESCO, 1995) 15.
[23] Black, "Native Assets: Controlling Our Futures," 12.
[24] Black, "Redefining Success in Community Development," 11.
[25] Emery Castle, "A Primer on Rural Community Sustainability," Oregon State University Extension Service, Miscellaneous 8818, Nov. 2002, 7.
[26] Black,11.
[27] Jonathan Rowe, "The Majesty of the Commons," Washington *Monthly* Apr. 2002.
[28] Hufford 2.
[29] Ibid 7.
[30] Ibid 3.
[31] David Bollier, "Rediscovery of the Commons," 17 Sept. 2004 < http://www.tompaine.com/.>
[32] David Bollier, "David Bollier Replies," Summer 2002, 17 Sept. 2004 <http://bostonreview.net/BR27.3/bollier.html>. David Bollier and respondents, "Ruled by the Market?" 17 Sept. 2004 <http://bostonreview.net/BR27.3/bollier-replies.html>.

A Holistic Approach to Development

The goal of the Santa Fe discussions was "not how to put cultural heritage and environmental stewardship back together," as Mary Hufford phrased it in her advance paper, "but [to consider] how to keep them from being taken apart in the first place."[1] As she went on to explain, "Categories like 'cultural heritage' and 'environmental stewardship' imply a distinction between 'cultural' and 'natural' that does not hold up under close scrutiny."

Fundamental Principles

Asked to suggest strategies that might make the most of inherent connections among cultural conservation, environmental stewardship, and sustainable livelihoods, gathering participants articulated guidelines communities should keep in mind when they find themselves in situations like those encountered by Harpswell, Maine, the Tohono O'odham (Desert People), and so many others. To mitigate the impact of external influences and outside forces, they should:

- *Reframe the question.*

Communities in crisis are hard pressed to see beyond a quick-fix, but they need to weigh the likely impacts of proposals at hand and their desirability, as well as alternatives of potentially greater value. Most importantly, they need to understand the true situation. Crises are often evidence of deeper issues.

What are the real underlying concerns? Agriculture can be viewed as a solution to the problem of how to raise children, it was said, as much as how to make a living. A participant noted that his tribe began organic farming not out of interest in organic farming but to protect water rights. Reframing the question means seeing through new "lenses," shifting the focus from economic development to community well-being, for example, and reformulating the question so that there is more than one approach. Problems with environmental sustainability are usually rooted elsewhere – in social, cultural, and economic causes.

• *Focus on long-term, desirable outcomes, locating where true value lies.*

Laurie Monti, of Northern Arizona University, referred to the work of the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire in describing how to engage people in reflecting on issues around which they "feel energy," as she put it. It could be diabetes, or health issues, or schooling, as well as jobs.

From such analysis can come an understanding of where real long-term concern and value lie. Others suggested working from a cultural frame to break the problem down further by asking "What do we want to preserve? What are we willing to risk?" The community can go on to "develop a framework that links vision and goals to indicators and assessment criteria,"[2] measures that reflect community values and offer a sense of direction – one with a time horizon that allows for all elements of the process to have integrity.[3]

First Nations Development Institute, which has worked with tribal communities for decades, sees four areas of potential desired outcomes. They include the trade and exchange, income, and productivity skills associated with "economics;" the personal initiative, responsibility, health, and safety of "personal efficacy;" political and civic participation, social respect, and cultural integrity as examples of "kinship;" and the vision, choices, future orientation, and environmental balance that constitute "spirituality."[4] All should figure in a community's contemplation of long-term value or progress.

• *Enlarge understanding of what constitutes wealth, capital, and assets.*

"Naming" assets empowers a community not only to recognize where value lies but also to identify resources that can be leveraged; "community asset inventories" and "mapping" are wonderful tools, said participants. Assets should also be construed in the widest possible sense. The obvious ones are *financial*, such as stocks, bonds, and any form of monetized investment;

physical, including buildings, utilities, and transportation systems; *natural*, such as land, wildlife, forests, minerals, oil, and gas; and *institutional*, such as financial intermediaries, nonprofits, and philanthropic institutions.

Less obvious are *human capital* – the skills, knowledge, education, experience, and health of citizens; *social capital*, or the networks and social relationships "that support the building and maintenance of assets but do not in themselves generate income;"[5] *legal and political assets* that include decision-making power (and in Indian country, sovereign status and tax immunity); and *cultural assets* like language and traditions (and in the case of tribal people, indigenous knowledge). Although usually considered intangible, "the material expressions of culture can generate income and other assets."[6] *Creative capital*, or the work of a group recently dubbed "the creative class" – scientists, engineers, architects, educators, writers, artists, and entertainers, among others – is gaining credence as yet another asset.[7]

Below: Traditionally, Tohono O'odham basketry is passed on through generations of family. TOCA works to maintain this continuity and supports classes to teach basketry techniques and traditions.

Naming assets helps a community define its "story." The process reflects what is valued, and creates the possibility of communicating with other "stories" or communities. The Northern Forest Center wanted to identify what makes the forested regions of northern New England and New York State distinctive so over several years it asked of communities and citizens, "What are the assets and values most important to the overall wealth, or well-being of the Northern Forest?"

Based on answers it gathered, the Center developed its "wealth index" and metrics on "which to reflect on actions, and ensure that they are leading in a healthy, productive, and sustainable direction."[8] Among these metrics: voter participation and public libraries as measures of social capital; property and violent crime and domestic assaults as barometers of safety; local historical societies as maintenance of cultural identity and social traditions; "good" air quality days and the acidity of

precipitation as estimates of air quality; road surface conditions and high speed Internet access as a survey of infrastructure; and amounts of forest land and forest reserves as a gauge of forest areas sufficient to maintain biodiversity, among many others.[9]

What makes asset-based development so worthwhile, it was said, is being able to "put things on a par" – an invaluable aid in advocating for particular policies. It offers touchstones for a community to answer the question "why do you want to do this instead of that?"

Above: Three Generations, Kamaka Ukulele Family. The Kamakas are a typical *Hapa* (mixed ancestry) Hawaiian family, including Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, English, Acadian French, Spanish, Belgian, German, Dutch, Portuguese and Syrian. 'Ano'ano Aloha is assisting the Kamaka family to record an oral history, and will work with Dr. Martina Kamaka to develop a traditional Hawaiian healing practices and healing plants curriculum for University of Hawaii medical students.

• *Involve a wide range of stakeholders.*

To gain a comprehensive picture of values and needs, a broad cross-section of players and stakeholders must be engaged in community development processes. All generations, classes, and races, as well as both sexes should be represented – informal voices as well as official leaders.

Based on their training in ethnographic technique and their field experience, folklorists and ethnographers are adept at cultural surveys (inventories of cultural assets) and needs assessments, and can help identify such participants. "In recognizing the value of localized knowledge and vernacular concepts, [sic] they can restore to local citizens the authority that has been given over to experts."[10]

Other individuals identified as useful: people good at intuitive, as well as rational thinking because they're able to suggest perspectives or imagine options others don't, and people who can bridge language and sectors, like the divide between a community's own articulated vision and the jargon of economic development. In tribal communities decisions are often made on the basis of feelings about community or culture. "I've seen developers come in with beautiful plans, laying out numbers," Tristan Reader, Co-Director of Tohono O'odham Community Action, noted, "and the elders say 'no, we don't think it would be a good idea for the community. Intuition is drummed out of us in school, but it is essential." Artists are valuable, as well, because they know how to release creativity.

When land sites are contemplated, those who know about sacred sites, gathering grounds, and religious sites are essential. Native peoples are often left out because

they're not considered "professional," it was said, but visioning must be open to different sensibilities and definitions. Youth aren't professional either, but their involvement is critical, too: if they stay in the community they're the ones who will be affected by decisions made, both now and later.

Being inclusive doesn't insure success and is never easy, participants admitted, but it is indispensable, and the cost is worthwhile. A community is never a single, homogeneous entity. Inclusiveness insures there will be multiple approaches to multiple issues and needs.

- *Find the best point of entry – whether environmental, cultural, or economic – and work from there, engaging in a process of shared inquiry and learning.*

Democracy is best accomplished through what John Dewey termed a process of "shared inquiry."[11] Conference-goers agreed. Faced with a development crisis, a community needs to inform itself, and the best way is through a participatory process. Again, the goal is to be inclusive: often those who will be most affected by bad jobs, seasonal jobs, and the consequences of development are left out of the decision-making so their only recourse is to mobilize against it.

Outside facilitators can sometimes help create spaces for reflection to occur and guide shared inquiry. They can help communities understand their options, move beyond stereotypes (not all developers are bad), assist in finding neutral terms for discussions, lessen the tendency to set people apart (as environmentalists or developers), and in general lower the potential for adversarial situations to develop. They can remind people that while strategies may be at loggerheads, interests may not be.

- *Be guided by local, communal knowledge.*

Developing a vision that identifies true wealth, and tailors desired outcomes and indicators to reflect values and priorities, is a matter of tapping what has been called "cultural DNA."[12] Cultural traditions embody the collective memory and wisdom of communities, and are central to the ability of individuals to respond to and adapt to change. But vetting change is no easy task – as a participant noted, bioregionalists concur that our current problems on planet Earth are in good measure problems of culture; some adaptations are better than others.

How to make these distinctions? It is being aware and appreciative of the "cultural core," Angelo Joaquin, Jr. suggested. In Indian country that includes "traditional leadership roles; indigenous knowledge systems; traditional etiology; traditional communications systems; and tribal institutions and organizations."[13] Look at a community's creation story. What does it say is valuable? And seek the

wisdom of elders: in tribal communities one aspect of culture remains strong, despite the superimposition of outside development models, and that is "the quiet strength of respected and revered leadership."[14] In the end, change may all "hinge on what the elder in the corner says."

If there is enough support in a community, change can then be conscious, or at least people will be aware of the tradeoffs. As the Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen, has noted, "If a traditional way of life has to be sacrificed to escape grinding poverty or miniscule longevity (as many traditional societies have had for thousands of years), then it is the people directly involved who must have the opportunity to participate in deciding what should be chosen."[15]

Above: *Ahupua'a* model at Limahuli, U.S. National Botanical Garden, Haena, Kauai. Before Western contact, the Hawaiian ancestors lived abundant and sustainable lives through cultivating the *ahupua'a*, a traditional land division that runs from the mountains to the sea. Today a grassroots movement to restore *ahupua'a* is underway on each "major" island.

Conference participants acknowledged "the enormity of the problems confronting rural America discourages an enthusiastic response," as Dee Davis put it. "Rural Americans are poorer, sicker, less well-educated, and more likely to be addicted than their metropolitan counterparts. Government programs, such as the farm bill, too frequently serve a small portion of rural Americans while being touted as a solution for the many. Still, rural America has a bounty of assets from which to fashion a spirited response."[16] And the benefits of harnessing those resources in holistic, asset-based development are many:

- Spirituality drives people, and tapping cultural resources energizes.
- Communities are less likely to go down the wrong path if they take a balancing approach.
- The synergies of a holistic approach improve everyone's efforts, through "the collaborative effect" – if you bring very different people together something new and unexpected just happens.

As one participant concluded, "development should be seen as a beautiful word."

Strategies & Tools for Empowering Holistic Approaches

Conference-goers also suggested specific strategies that might be employed. Among them:

Promote local supply/demand. *This may involve changing tastes. Hawaii imports grain-fed beef because consumers prefer it, though grass-fed beef is available locally. (Efforts are underway to change this preference.) Learn what national and international interest there might be in what is available locally, and encourage businesses and financial institutions that nurture local "enterprise development."*

Support informal local economic systems, like barter. *Areas of intense poverty rely on them – "most everyone I know, including family members and those I work with, is involved in trade and barter systems," Moises Gonzales reported. "They're alive and well in northern New Mexico." But alternative economies, like produce exchanges, can be useful anywhere.*

Involve outside activists to serve as a "vector" in countering inertia. *Activists from outside the community helped create the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, it was noted; they know how to affirm and build up the confidence of local people sapped by hopelessness.*

Focus on the 80% of issues that people agree on in planning, not the 20% they don't. *Identify what people have in common, or where interests intersect. Environmentalists and cultural conservationists were both said to have a reverence for habitat, for example. Don't be discouraged by the time required or the inevitable in-fighting – that's part of the process too. Local processes should build hope.*

Consider the contextual issues and direct and indirect pressures that are brought to bear, *such as government policies, to determine what must be addressed. Break the problem down into smaller parts to see more clearly which components are technical, which are social, and so forth.*

Show, rather than tell, the value of alternatives. *Tohono O'odham Community Action sold its idea of returning to traditional agriculture to the Tohono O'odham community by demonstrating the value. "When people see something that's working, that becomes your argument," as Tristan Reader explained.*

Look for others who are dealing with the same circumstances – "sister communities" *– to share data, ideas, precedents, models, and best practices.*

Ally with universities to learn about best practices and the possibility of serving as a research site. *Study local sustainable enterprise. "We're all vulnerable to the next big economic deal," a participant suggested. "Toyota comes in and the conversation changes. What is the enterprise framework that makes us not care when Toyota comes in? In many places that kind of enterprise is already going on. We should examine what makes it work." We should also look at benefits local communities gain by working within a capitalist/legalist/ property rights paradigm.*

Support place-based education *that "preserves local culture, uncovers community history, documents folkways, and protects small schools as the center of community life."[17] The Georgia-based Foxfire program is a well-known example of education that respects core community values, uses participatory documentation and research in getting youth to learn about their "place," and perpetuates the wisdom of elders.*

But there are equally compelling more recent models, like the Louisiana Voices Folklife in Education Project (www.louisianavoices.org) and the Rural School and Community Trust. The Trust focuses on the crucial relationship between good schools and thriving rural communities in some of the country's poorest, most challenging rural places, where there are historic patterns of poverty and racism, declines in population, consistent demographic changes, and cycles of economic change.

Place-based education should also build local capacity, first and foremost. Rural community colleges were termed the "extension service of the knowledge era" because they train wildlife biologists, farmers, engineers – whatever nearby communities are thought to need. They are also magnets for growth and a center of cultural and economic activity.

Take advantage of the power of gathering and create occasions *for people to share their views and vision, to be acknowledged and heard.*

Preserve languages. *The disconnect between cultural conservation, environmental stewardship, and development can in part be traced to the loss of languages.*

Remember that everything begins with little steps. Any place is a good place to start.

Profile: Sherry Salway Black The Role of Culture in Asset-based Development

If land is the most visible of assets, Native Americans would be viewed as the wealthiest of Americans: Indian tribes are collectively the single largest private land holders in the U.S., according to the First Nations Development Institute. The problem: they do not "control" the land as other private landowners would, reports Sherry Salway Black, the Institute's Senior Vice President.

This has led First Nations to work on restoring Native control over Native assets so that tribes can reap the benefits of ownership. Restoring control of the land has significant potential for reviving traditional food systems. "The potential for a food-related economic sector in Indian Country is huge," says Black.

But it has also led the Institute to highlight "hidden wealth" on which tribes, communities, families, and individuals might also draw. "From the beginning First Nations has recognized how crucial culture is to economic development," says Black. Core values of Native American culture – reciprocity and equitable distribution – are extraordinary assets, for example, along with the knowledge and skills of Native people. And their potential yields are not only psychological, but economic.

In 1988 First Nations completed "A Study of Traditional and Informal Sector Micro-Enterprise Activity and Its Impact on the Pine Ridge Reservation Economy" in collaboration with the Lakota Fund of South Dakota, which looked at activities like catering, sewing, serving food at Pow Wows, and performing in cultural activities. In part thanks to the Lakota Fund's micro-enterprise program, which has underwritten efforts to link such culture-related activity with economic and community development for almost twenty years, Pine Ridge is no longer the poorest area of the country.

Today some tribes are developing businesses tied to traditional foods and agriculture as a tool not only for economic development but health and cultural identity. Others, like the Southern Ute, are investing land-based economic gains (they have extensive oil and gas riches) in building for the future: tribal members can receive educational funds to "study anything anywhere anytime," according to Black. "They're really vested in culture and recognize the critical investment in education of tribal members."

Since the concept of asset-based development first took hold in public policy discussions of social welfare, federal agencies have sponsored pilot projects also; HHS, HUD, and the Agriculture department have all been involved. All acknowledge that *control* of assets is crucial: "people think and behave differently when they are accumulating assets," says Black, noting a point made by Michael

[1] Mary Hufford, "Wild Ginseng, Ethnography, and the Democratic Prospect," (Commissioned paper, the Fund for Folk Culture, 2003) 1.
[2] Emery Castle, "A Primer on Rural Community Sustainability," Oregon State University Extension Service, *Miscellaneous 8818*, Nov. 2002, 5.
[3] Castle 5.
[4] Sherry Salway Black, "Asset Building in Native Communities: An Asset Building Framework," (Fredericksburg, Virginia: First Nations Development Institute) 8.
[5] Black 5.
[6] Black 5.
[7] In the work of Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It Is Transforming Work, Leisure Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Florida is the John Heinz III Professor of Regional Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University.
[8] Northern Forest Center, *Northern Forest Wealth Index: Exploring a Deeper Meaning of Wealth*, n.d., 5.
[9] Northern Forest Center 2.
[10] Hufford 2.
[11] Hufford 2.
[12] Sherry Salway Black, "Redefining Success in Community Development: A New Approach for Determining and Measuring the Impact of Development" (The Richard Schramm Paper on Community Development, Lincoln Filene Center at Tufts University, 1994) 7.
[13] Black 11.
[14] Black 11.
[15] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 31.
[16] Dee Davis and Tim Marema, "A Rural Perspective" (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Center for Rural Strategies, 2002) 11.
[17] Davis and Marema 9.

Sherraden, author of *Assets and the Poor*.

But acknowledging the full range of resources, available means, and inheritances that can be drawn on is equally crucial. "Aha" is a frequent response Black receives when she describes First Nations' asset-based development paradigm. African Americans and Hispanics are especially quick to recognize the hidden wealth of values and customs, she says. "People get it – particularly in poor communities. It's not lost on them."

Above: Signifying a time-honored tradition, weathered signs point the way to rural homes in Errol, New Hampshire.

Profile: Stephen Blackmer
Bridging Boundaries of Sector and Geography

When a paper company put over a million acres on the market fifteen years ago, "it triggered responses all over the Northeast," remembers Stephen Blackmer, President of the Northern Forest Center in Concord, New Hampshire. The situation represented equal parts vulnerability and opportunity: much of the land was to be auctioned off for subdivision and development.

At the time Blackmer was one of many environmentalists who hoped most of the acreage might be kept in some form of forest economy. The appetite for timber from cities just to the south, the consolidating of regional interests into multinationals, and the growth of tourism and seasonal residency had already had a dramatic impact on northern New York and New England, where wetlands, lakes, rolling hills, and rugged mountains characterize the landscape. Livelihoods that had sustained residents of the region's small towns for generations were already beleaguered.

When Congress authorized the Forest Service to set up a study committee to explore options for keeping the remaining land intact, Blackmer thus stepped forward to organize environmental groups – a dozen that ultimately grew to include forty-five organizations representing local, state, and national interests.

Almost from the beginning the coalition – the Northern Forest Alliance – found itself focusing not just on the environment, as might have been expected, but on what Blackmer calls "a three-legged mantra" – conserving the wilderness, continuing some form of forest management that would sustain local economies, and working to meet the needs of local people. "At the time there was great fear and tension surrounding the future," he says by way of explaining the third, and rather unusual, objective. "So we had to take people into account. We had to embrace the tension and fear."

It was hard to get a fix on this third area – "we were environmentalists, after all, so we could 'do' wilderness and forest management," he laughs, "but that third leg gave us trouble." After five years, Blackmer left the Northern Forest

Alliance to form the Northern Forest Center to tackle the people side of the challenge.

The Center staff began talking with hundreds of individuals across the four-state region to get a picture of what people need and ideas about what might be done; to learn what "makes a community viable, what you need to pay attention to, what goes into a 'sense of place.'" They took three approaches. One was ethnographic – gathering stories that would illuminate "a sense of place." Another was metric in developing indicators of well-being and value. Still a third focused on developing policy, and especially, at what levels to intervene.

"I'm not sure there's a faster way to do all this," Blackmer chuckles. "It's taken fifteen years already, and we're still working to encourage understanding of the holistic approach we believe in so much. It really takes a shift in generations for such systemic change – commitment on that scale. But pieces can be done all along."

Blackmer thinks a new project, dubbed *Ways of the Woods*, will help strengthen the region's sense of identity and deepen understanding of the cultures, chiefly Native American and Anglo-European, whose values have nurtured that identity. And "they are very different," Blackmer notes. A mobile exhibition of the northern forest's history will tour small towns, where educational programming and performances of traditional arts and folkways will be offered.

Obstacles in taking a holistic approach to development abound, Blackmer concedes – trying to involve businesspeople who are quite naturally focused on their businesses, working with public agencies that are "siloed" by the limits of their authority. But he and his staff are determined to work with organizations that exist despite the entanglements with entrenched powers that follow. The hope is to make everyone "better, more effective – to *not* add new layers."

Ultimately, the Northern Forest Center hopes to enlist 300 to 400 organizations in an "overarching framework" that can coalesce into smaller regional or affinity groups to work on policy. More than seventy are already on board and are taking a common legislative agenda to Washington, one that addresses regional infrastructure, economic development, education, land conservation, culture, and support for communities.

"Every step of the way, we've had to work at bridging boundaries of sector and geography," says Blackmer. How have they done it? "By figuring out how to work together to enlarge the pie for everyone. It doesn't always work, but the act of collaborating has a magical tendency to unleash ideas, time, and money. We've had enough success to say 'we don't know how, but this will work.'"

And ultimately? "We would love to be just one geographic node of something that's happening all over."

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Above: Seng hoes are used to cultivate ginseng.

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Seri shaman singing at sunset after the successful launch of a reed boat. At one time, the Seri navigated the gulf in reed boats for fishing and travel to the islands of San Esteban and Tiburon, located in the Sea of Cortez, Baja California.

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