

Aurland, Norway

OPENING of the first European ECONOMUSÉE

JULY 1ST 2009

**Notes for a speech by Cyril Simard, Ph.D.
Chairman of the Board of the International Network
ÉCONOMUSÉE® Society**

Dear friends of Hordaland County Council,

Distinguished guests,

Je suis heureux et touché d'être ici pour l'inauguration du premier ECONOMUSÉE® européen. Cette journée coïncide avec la fête nationale du Canada en ce 1^{er} juillet. C'est donc un grand jour de fête pour nous tous, de célébrer ici dans ce beau pays de Norvège – nous qui partageons une belle histoire de cultures, de valeurs et d'idées partagées.

The inauguration of the first European ECONOMUSÉE® is a happy and moving experience for me. This day coincides with Canada's national holiday on the 1st of July. It is a happy occasion for all of us, to celebrate here in this beautiful country – Norway, all of us who share a history of cultures, values and shared ideas.

Twenty-five years ago, I visited the small and historic city of Fredriskstads where I met artisans who welcomed me in their shop and who showed me their work. I must say I have always been impressed by the quality of their craft. Norway was a country that resembled us. It took care to preserve its architecture, the landscape was similar and so was the preservation of traditions as Grieg inspired me for mixing folk music and modern inspiration. It reminded me of my own country. You inspired me. Over the years, I continued to search for countries that are mindful of the respect for the heritage

environment, for sustainable development and for the survival of identity-based businesses.

But the real story of **ECONOMUSÉE®** ... begins. In 1984, in the area where I come from, in Charlevoix (Québec, Canada), when I inherited a small artisan paper mill, La Papeterie Saint-Gilles, which was going to close because of financial difficulties and the departure of its principal patron, a renowned industrialist. So I took up the challenge of keeping the business alive by introducing new ideas, in particular by linking the economic and cultural functions without succumbing to mimesis or to a heartless economic approach.

I am proud to say that, for the last twenty-five years, this paper mill developed good practices to ensure its financial security while improving the quality of life and the well-being of its artisans. This initial success served as an impetus to forge ahead and to test this new approach with other artisan workshops in Canada. Following several successful experiments and after defending a doctoral thesis in applied ethnology, a private non-profit organisation was set up to create a network for this "Heritage That Earns Its Keep" as it is known today. The **International ECONOMUSÉE® Network Society** now fulfills this responsibility.

Its mission is to go beyond the logic of the market, which is often only interested in the superficial characteristic of objects stripped of their cultural context.

The main spin-offs are the following:

- Promoting the status of the artisan;
- Proudly transmitting one's know-how through words and actions directly to the public;
- Transmitting creative skills from one generation to the next;
- Conserving intangible heritage in producing tangible products;
- Promoting the diversity of cultures, trades and know-how;

- Bringing the artisan and the consumer into close contact
- Increasing the tourism offer in the area

Remember that the ECONOMUSÉE® concept is well developed according to six principal components. We can see that these components are present here. However, they cannot be applied in the same way everywhere because it depends, among other things, on the thousands of lives, socio-economic contexts, types of handicrafts, and places where these trades are practiced. That is where the universal character of ECONOMUSÉE® comes from.

An initiative taken to save a small paper mill twenty-five years ago had a significant impact by combining **economy** and **culture**, sustainable development and equitable work. Today, our International Society and our regional societies, all of which are non-profit organisations, have committees and codes of ethics to support their quest for excellence. They are part of a network of 50 ECONOMUSÉE®, spread across five Canadian provinces, bringing together more than three hundred and fifty artisans and welcoming some 750.000 visitors in 2007, looking for an authentic experience.

In the future, the greatest danger appears to be the loss of our passion for fighting the ravages of unbridled development, of inequitable work, resulting from globalisation... It is an insidious threat that strikes us directly into our hearts.

Speaking of people with heart, I would like to pay a special tribute to the first European artisan, Mr Sven Idar, who believed in our concept by creating the ECONOMUSÉE® in his workshop. Thanks to his tenacity, we are here today to celebrate. Thank you to the Hordaland County Council and their communities and the steering committee who with the help of quality professionals, architects, historians, graphic artists and ethnologists accomplished a professional result respecting the wonderful approach of "Small is Beautiful". On this occasion, I would like to offer you a souvenir of the first ECONOMUSÉE® of Canada – the Papeterie Saint-Gilles – made from the labour of our artisans and inlaid with the flowers of our country.

Today, UNESCO's new conventions on cultural diversity and intangible heritage give new hope for those who are in a period of reflection, or who are working actively to "Give Heritage a Future".

Faced with the diversity of our perspectives on heritage, we think of this quotation by Saint-Augustine: "Heritage is a huge palace."(2)

There is, therefore, room for all of us.

Thank you very much

Cyril Simard, Ph.D.

Architect, designer and ethnologist

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the International
ECONOMUSÉE® Network Society.

(2) Loose translation of "La mémoire est un vaste palais."