

Notes for a speech given by
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at the International Conference on the
UNESCO 1972, 2003 and 2005 conventions
“SYNERGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT:
Using Natural and Cultural Heritage in Sustainable Development”
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here in Bergen this afternoon to talk about a subject close to my heart, the ÉCONOMUSÉE®. I wish to thank our friends in Bergen for having invited me to participate in this important international conference.

As you may have read in the programme of the conference, I had the opportunity to hold the position of Rector at Université Laval in Québec City, a city that, like Bergen, shares the honour of being designated a “World Heritage City” by UNESCO.

University research and economic reality

During my mandate as Rector, I often quipped that “Research does not have to be useless to be valid.” This was to counter the argument of those who felt that university research should be confined to the limits of pure research – totally free and without any immediate practical application. I, on the other hand, was of the opinion that when society invests half a billion dollars per year in an organization such as the one I was responsible for managing, it is entitled to expect economic spinoffs. I also felt that applied research, as well as fundamental research, could provide students with the learning and training possibilities that define university research. This is quite obvious in engineering or clinical research, for example. I strongly supported industrial research, technology transfer, patenting and the launch of spinoffs resulting from university research which have undoubtedly contributed to the fact that Québec City has the lowest unemployment rate in Canada; around 4%.

But what is true in the field of science and technology is no less true in the field of the arts and social sciences. I could provide you with myriad examples of social and economic spinoffs of university research in these areas. However, I will give you but one single example in my exposé today entitled “ÉCONOMUSÉE®: a university thesis gives rise to an international cultural and economic innovation.”

Origin of the ÉCONOMUSÉE®

There is a man at the origin of the concept and even the word, ÉCONOMUSÉE®. Dr. Cyril Simard is an architect, designer and ethnologist. When the great writer and Quebec poet Félix-Antoine Savard died, Simard inherited a traditional craft enterprise founded

by his mentor: a floundering stationary shop on the verge of closing. For several years, he strived to ensure the survival of the enterprise and ensure its profitability. From this

very tough experience, a vast project slowly emerged. Concerned about the threat looming over traditional trades slowly being replaced by industrial mass production, worried about the uncertain future reserved for artisans and their contribution to the cultural identity of their country and wanting to ensure continuity in their work and safeguard their art, Cyril Simard decided to complete a Ph.D. in ethnology at Université Laval (1). This was in 1986. Three years later, he published a popular version of his thesis, entitling it “Economuseology: How to make a cultural enterprise profitable” [translation](2). In it, the author described his vision of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® based on six components.

ÉCONOMUSÉE® components

An ÉCONOMUSÉE® should have:

- A reception area
- A production workshop (the very heart of the ÉCONOMUSÉE®)
- An area to exhibit objects from the past
- An interpretive space for contemporary production
- A space for consultation (documentation, archives, models, etc.)
- A boutique or commercial gallery

These components are expressed through a certain number of conditions of admission or criteria leading to the enterprise’s designation as an ÉCONOMUSÉE®. They should be kept in mind, because not just any craft enterprise can claim the title of ÉCONOMUSÉE®:

- Be a private for-profit enterprise in operation for three years
- Use a time-honoured technique or traditional know-how to craft products
- Make products of recognized quality
- Have the ability and desire to innovate in production
- Produce year round and welcome the public at least four months per year
- Sales exceeding \$75,000 per year (or 50 000€)
- Demonstrate marked interest in welcoming visitors

- Be located on, or near, a tourist route already identified or under development

- Operate in buildings with enough space for all components of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® and welcome visitors (maximum of 50 at a time) or intend to develop such premises
- Operate out of a quality site and buildings

The ÉCONOMUSÉE® is the “**artisan at work**” or, as Simard likes to say: “**Heritage earning a living.**”

The typical profile of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® becomes clear through these components and eligibility criteria: a workshop where one or more artisans craft useful, decorative or edible products based on traditional methods and in full view of visitors who may ask questions, admire a historic and contemporary exhibit, read documents on the trade and make onsite purchases of original products made in the workshop. At the same time, the cultural, educational, museum-related, touristic, economic and ecological aspects of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® become evident. One can surmise that the ideal ÉCONOMUSÉE® will provide visitors with a unique and memorable experience that places them in contact with a past tangible in the present and very much before their eyes through the hands of the artisan at work.

Success of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® concept

1) In Quebec:

As our French colleagues would say, « C’est au fruit que l’on juge l’arbre ». The progressive implementation of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® concept has demonstrated the pertinence and effectiveness of the concept. A few figures illustrate the fact. In Quebec, where the concept originated and was first implemented:

- There are 33 ÉCONOMUSÉE® (18 in craft trades and 15 in the agro-food sector)
- Sales total more than \$35 million
- They account for 500 jobs

- They welcome 650,000 visitors per year, 18% from outside Quebec.

2) Elsewhere in Canada:

The concept is also well established elsewhere in Canada in the Atlantic provinces (10 ÉCONOMUSÉE®) and Western Canada (British Columbia and Saskatchewan: 2).

3) In Northern Europe:

It is a source of great pride for us to see a uniquely Quebec innovation like the ÉCONOMUSÉE® garner such great success outside Canada – although perhaps not comparable to that of Céline Dion or the Cirque du Soleil – the ÉCONOMUSÉE® concept is nonetheless firmly established in Northern Europe with 26 businesses: 2 in the Faeroe Islands, 3 in Iceland, 4 in Ireland, 3 in Great Britain, 3 in Sweden, 1 in Greenland and, hold tight, 10 in Norway, among which the magnificent “*Hillesvåge ullverefabrikk*,” a wool factory owned by a family since 1898 that has just become an ÉCONOMUSÉE®. We will be visiting it tomorrow during our excursion (3). This will afford you the chance to see a concrete example of the concept that I have attempted to describe to you today and that translates itself now in 71 enterprises.

I am especially happy to salute the drive of the people who contributed singularly to this rapid expansion in Europe; among them Professor Claude Dubé, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Landscaping, Art and Design at Université Laval and Messrs. Terje Inderhaug and Magne Haugseng (present here). Without them, the success we are reaping today would not have been possible.

4) Success acknowledged internationally

The innovative nature of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® has been acknowledged everywhere as one of the great “finds” to ensure the survival of traditional trades and the preservation of intangible heritage representing the τέχνη of artisans worldwide.

“*Extinction is forever,*” repeat ecologists concerned about the survival of animal and plant species. But should we not show the same concern for “putting a stop to the death of languages” (Hagège, 2000) or devote less energy to keeping the arts and traditional crafts alive? Either way, they are as much alternatives to being human and expressions of human creativity threatened with irreversible extinction (4). The ÉCONOMUSÉE® is uniquely adapted to safeguarding their survival, and in this respect, is consistent with the mission of UNESCO as highlighted by UNESCO representative Sonia Ramzi in her preface to the collective work published by Cyril

Simard entitled: “*Des métiers... de la tradition à la création. Anthologie en faveur d’un patrimoine qui gagne sa vie*»:

“Protecting this tangible and intangible heritage, preserving, developing revitalizing and visiting it, taking ownership of it, sharing it, transmitting it to future generations, making it a source of pride and sustainable development for local populations are one of UNESCO’s fundamental missions...” [translation](5)

It should come as no surprise that Université Laval was the first to establish a UNESCO Chair for cultural heritage, that Cyril Simard was the first Chair holder and that Professor Claude Dubé, here present, is now the Chair holder.

The ÉCONOMUSÉE® innovation also led to the establishment of an international label and the development of a truly international network of ÉCONOMUSÉE®. The future lies in strengthening the outreach of this label and consolidating the network.

Tomorrow’s challenges

I won’t develop this point because the time allotted to me is short. However, I will conclude in saying that, in my opinion, the main challenges facing the ÉCONOMUSÉE® in the future are the following:

- Quickly increase the number of ÉCONOMUSÉE® in Quebec, Canada and Europe, but if at all possible, in other parts of the world where arts and traditional crafts are no less imperilled, in order to achieve a critical mass

and further strengthen the international brand image of ÉCONOMUSÉE®, its attractiveness to tourists and, by the same token, its economic impact.

- Consolidate networking among this group of cultural and economic enterprises at the level of each country and worldwide.

- Convince state governments of the pertinence of financially supporting the transformation of many craft enterprises into ÉCONOMUSÉE® so they may become profitable and self-sufficient; conditions underlying their survival and success in preserving the cultural identity of different peoples in a context of sustainable development.

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(1) SIMARD, Cyril, *L'économuséologie. Essai d'ethnologie appliquée*,
Thèse de doctorat, Université Laval, 1986.

- (2) SIMARD, Cyril, *Économuséologie. Comment rentabiliser une entreprise culturelle*, Centre éducatif et culturel inc., Montréal, 1989, 170 p.
- (3) View the short film
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxwQF_5laZc
- (4) GERVAIS, Michel, *Le sens de l'ÉCONOMUSÉE®*, dans SIMARD, Cyril, ouvrage collectif : *Des métiers... de la tradition à la création. Anthologie en faveur d'un patrimoine qui gagne sa vie*, Les Éditions GID, Québec, pp. 368-370.
- (5) RAMZI, Sonia, *Une anthologie pour notre temps*, ibidem, p. 13.