

## CANSEE 2009 CONFERENCE Report

### Combined CANSEE/ GAINING GROUND CONFERENCE

#### 1. Introduction:

In planning for the 2009 CANSEE Conference, the CANSEE executive evaluated several conference options. A major concern was CANSEE's tight financial situation which was primarily caused by the global financial crisis. The executive concluded that a conventional CANSEE conference would not be possible due to financial constraints, and therefore cancellation of the annual conference was seriously considered. A solution was found as a result of conversations with Gene Miller (President, Centre for Urban Innovation, and responsible for putting on the Gaining Ground conference). Initial discussions uncovered a number of shared principles and values. As a result of further negotiations it was decided to hold a joint conference.

#### 2. Key Considerations for the Planning of the Combined Conference:

a) Common purpose and principles: Both CANSEE and Gaining Ground groups were in agreement on important sustainability principles, and on the practical benefits of integrating different groups working towards sustainability solutions.

##### b) Benefits for Gaining Ground (GG):

In spite of the smaller size of the CANSEE group, Gaining Ground (GG) has a great amount of respect for CANSEE's academic track record as well as its international reach. Integration was perceived by GG as potentially enhancing the scientific legitimacy of the conference, as well as being able to expand the GG network on a global scale.

##### c) Benefits for CANSEE:

The CANSEE executive was aware that attempts to combine the CANSEE conference with another group offered a number of benefits, while also presenting some major challenges. The executive saw the merits of the idea of aligning CANSEE with another group with similar principles and this was a major motivation behind approving the integration of the CANSEE conference with the larger GG organization. The CANSEE executive also had a vision of participants of the two conferences sharing knowledge and developing future contacts. Another major benefit was that GG has professional administration resources and had a reputation of putting on high quality conferences. While the executive was aware that this first integration effort would present a number of challenges (some known and some unknown), a major benefit was the possibility of being able to learn about the opportunities and barriers of CANSEE work together with non-academic stakeholders on sustainable issues.

d) General Cooperation and Financial Benefits:

On the financial side GG and CANSEE agreed on a formula for sharing costs based on the number of individual registered attendees. This was considered a fair arrangement for both groups. As well CANSEE benefitted from the generosity of GG in providing the administrative expertise related to most of the administrative conference venue details .

The whole integrative process required much good will and trust on both sides. This experience related to a vast number of new realities related to the combined conference. The cooperation and good will shown was a tribute to the “sustainable thinking and values” evident in the whole process . That special relationship of trust and good will amongst the organizers appears to be of key importance to fostering integration.

3. Challenges for Integration:

a) The dates of the GG conference and the CANSEE conference when tentatively planned were close together. The final decision of dates had to take into account a number of planning commitments already in place.

b) While each group (CANSEE and Gaining Ground) had been accustomed to putting on their own conferences, there was a major difference in logistical and communication resources. GG has extensive professional experience in conference organization with a complete staff and the ability to outsource. Unlike GG, CANSEE does not possess strong financial resources and these limited resources consisted of a small CANSEE committee and only a handful of students and volunteers, which places much additional work on some executive members.

c) There was a major difference in the projected size of the conferences. CANSEE had about 120-140 expected registered attendees , while GG expected over 400 people to register.

d) Public Perception: CANSEE is a small group and viewed as an Academic organization with little public presence . While CANSEE members are highly respected in academic circles, many CANSEE members do not have a prominent public profile or strong experience in working with non-academic environmental stakeholders. GG on the other hand is well known as a regional , broad based organization , including a broad spectrum of small, medium and larger professional organizations , mainly interested in regional issues. This included a broad spectrum of society, involving local governments, business, universities and many civil society organizations. The GG group was considered dynamic and proactive ,

with members having strong professional networks, which contrasted with the smaller and more research oriented CANSEE presence.

- e) While CANSEE and GG were discussing the logistics of the Vancouver conference, a smaller environmental group, Smart Growth, similar in focus to the GG group became the third official conference partner.

#### 4. CANSEE SURVEY :

A survey was administered to CANSEE conference participants. This survey formally assessed the background of CANSEE participants, as well as several issues related to ecological thinking, principles and practice.

The survey was developed by Professor Clive Spash (Norwegian University of Life Sciences) in collaboration with Anthony Ryan (CSIRO, Australia). The survey has also been administered to participants attending ecological economics conferences in (i) Europe (ii) United States and (iii) Australia and New Zealand.

The survey was used to develop a report that draws some conclusions as what may be some of the opportunities and barriers to formally integrating the ecological economics community with non-academic organizations. The report uses the responses from the CANSEE sample alongside the results from the USSEE conference sample. The survey report is attached for your review.

#### 5. OUTCOMES OF THE 2009 VANCOUVER CONFERENCE

**Overall Feedback:** A number of comments were received from GG administration and individual CANSEE executives regarding the joint conference experience.

##### a) General views of 2009 conference:

All feedback related to the need to integrate different groups in conference situations was positive. While there was agreement that such a step represented an important move towards CANSEE contributing to sustainability issues on a more practical level, there was a variety of opinions on how future integrated events should be formally organized.

Most feedback mentioned the importance of some kind of preparatory sessions and information related to the meaning of EE and how it fit into general sustainability

considerations of other environmental stakeholder groups. Such formal arrangements may help CANSEE members develop closer links with non-academic groups.

Another common feedback theme mentioned the need to increase communications processes, especially the CANSEE website, as a form for providing public information about the work of CANSEE and its participants. In that regard CANSEE needs to consider presenting a “common image” and set of principles as a way of providing a consistent and recognizable public image, even if this common image portrays CANSEE as being a diverse organization based upon pluralistic principles.

b) Logistics:

There was a lengthy list of feedback that provided specific recommendations for improving the logistics for a combined conference for the future. This feedback could provide valuable insights for other regions or countries. These can be valuable points also for a region or country planning a joint conference. For readers who are interested in these logistical details please contact us directly.

c) Program Content and Application of EE Principles:

All presentation abstracts for the 2009 Vancouver conference are posted on the CANSEE website. However, for readers with specific interest in Canadian experience in Sustainability related to ongoing projects in areas for example, such as sustainable governance, and whole community development we would be happy to refer you directly to project participants involved wherever possible.

The aim of the above information is to assist in the process of future integration attempts by the ecological economics community. Much work obviously needs to be done related to the future potential of integration for Sustainability.

Sincerely,

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