

# The Inevitability of International Dialogue

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There was an insightful and exciting revelation at the recent Sixth International Property Tax Institute (IPTI) Conference held in Vancouver this past Autumn.

It reflected what we have been reading about in our newspapers, magazines, and journals for more than a decade: two trends will affect us all—globalization and tribalism.

The revelation arose from a gathering of some 200 policymakers, senior government representatives, property assessors, academics, and taxpayers. There were delegates from more than 20 countries. Numerous municipalities, provinces, and nation states were represented. A half-dozen First Nations from British Columbia were also in attendance and part of the dialogue.

There were presentations from around the world on how jurisdictions were converting property wealth into community services, how global investors require assessment standards and stable societies. The evolution of property taxes, a pathway to success, was the theme running through the four-day event.

The conference was about sharing experiences on what works and what doesn't work. Many countries are embarking on valuation work without having a clear idea of the complexities of the entire assessment and property tax system, according to IPTI President Jerry Grad. As well, he said many "developed countries and provinces are facing policy challenges and alternatives."

While countries such as Brazil, Poland, the Czech Republic, Kosovo, and others outlined respective

initiatives to build their societies for stable investment and community services, First Nations administrators listened to what seemed common problems outlined by their international colleagues. There was growing awareness of shared global concerns for how we run our communities. How best do we serve our residents? How can the evolution of property tax best serve our local interests?

Kathleen Johnnie, Lands and Resources Coordinator, Sustainable Resource Group for the Snuneymuxw First Nation on Vancouver Island, said this kind of conference points out the need for more sessions on different land values—how people in emerging global societies must choose systems that work for them.

She said that the duality of traditional family/tribal land ownership in a contemporary economy can only work through increased dialogue. It is important, perhaps essential, to have a full understanding of both traditional and modern ways of sharing wealth and services. "Regional workshops for First Nations people would be helpful to discuss recommended options and alternatives within the treaty negotiation framework." Brazilian and other participants at the IPTI conference mentioned that their communities face some of the same issues. This kind of discussion is needed here in Canada.

In dialogue, when options and models are truly shared and where the property tax systems are genuinely evolving, "If you want the First Nations to consider taxation regimes, then all parties, including the

province and Canada, must also be in transition." Out of duality—and true dialogue—will come something new for all involved, continued Kathleen Johnnie. This understanding can benefit the First Nation involved, the province, and Canada, as well as adjacent communities.

At the conference, international delegates were also interested to find that Aboriginal people in Canada's First Nations were facing similar issues to the ones they faced back home. Open dialogue was evident at the IPTI conference. People from Europe and Asia, Africa, and the Americas shared ideas openly. Specifically, delegates from Kosovo, Brazil, and Mexico talked to Aboriginal people on common questions of necessary services for tribes within global economic stability.

It was suggested by Kathleen Johnnie and others that extensive regional dialogue in Canada needs to be organized. Common issues of economic development, community services, and revenue certainty face many re-emerging and evolving First Nations communities.

Options and consequences from *all* perspectives need to be examined carefully and understood by everyone. Older people, they say, often wiser, walk slowly so they don't trip.

Delegates from other countries mentioned how important the Aboriginal experience is to what is happening in their own countries. In some ways Canada's First Nations are leading where others need to go.

The international dialogue brought some of these concepts home.