

***Final Report of the Eco-Research Project "Sustainability In A Changing Cold-Ocean Environment." Dr. Rosemary Ommer, Principal Investigator.***

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## REVIEWS

*Final Report of the Eco-Research Project "Sustainability In A Changing Cold-Ocean Environment."* Dr. Rosemary Ommer, Principal Investigator. St. John's, ISER, M.U.N., 208 pp., appendices, bibliog., spiral binding, \$13.50, August 1998 (no ISBN)

### WILLIAM THRELFALL

*Jig a few cod or bag a moose for the winter larder? If you're a rural Newfoundlander, think again. Thanks to environmental crackdowns, your way of life is a crime.<sup>1</sup>*

THIS REPORT summarizes the results of an ambitious project concerning interrelationships between the Newfoundland economy, society and ecology that was undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team of academicians and other professionals from Memorial University and a variety of co-operating institutions. When studying ecology one may take one of two approaches; either autecological, where one studies the relationships between an individual organism or an individual species and its environment, or synecological, where the object of the study is the interrelationships amongst the organisms in a community. By using the latter approach to study the environment, both human and biological, in two selected areas of Newfoundland (Bonavista Headland and the Isthmus of Avalon) the researchers have broken new ground. Sociological studies in the past have tended to concentrate on the study of collective human behaviour while treating the natural environment as a separate entity. In this work the researchers have attempted to bring the two, non-anthropogenic and anthropogenic, together and look at the complex relationships that bind them together.

In explaining the rationale for choosing the study sites for this project Ommer notes that the waters surrounding Newfoundland and Labrador are characterized

by low water temperatures, a low species diversity with a high abundance and that the economy of Newfoundland was built on people who looked outwards toward the sea for their livelihood, until the collapse of the cod fishery and subsequent moratorium in 1992. The study was also designed to examine the stresses under which the inhabitants of rural fishing communities were living and to develop long-term sustainable strategies that would ensure the future of their rural way of life. An historical overview of both non-anthropogenic and anthropogenic factors is given, followed by a more detailed analysis of the same factors, and particularly the fishery, during the past century. Much original research was performed on both the marine and terrestrial ecosystems during this project. Included in the research were such esoteric topics as sediment analysis in Bonavista Bay, using a variety of sophisticated techniques. As stated earlier, Newfoundlanders in the past relied on the sea to make a living (formal part of the economy) and secondarily on terrestrial pursuits such as logging, berry-picking, etc.(informal economy), and while there was a link between the land and the sea, it was never strong. With the advent of Confederation, and with Joey Smallwood's seeming aversion to the fishing industry, attempts were made to redirect the economy of Newfoundland from the sea to the land, usually with disastrous results. The participants in the present venture show that the marine environment is relatively healthy, with the exception of a few animal species, most notably the cod, which may take several decades to recover from its over-exploitation. The terrestrial ecosystem, despite its impoverished and vulnerable nature, also appears to be relatively unspoiled and unpolluted. It is suggested that in the future there should be a closer linking between the two ecosystems with regard to human use and that the future sustainability of the outports and their inhabitants will depend on this relationship. I would be remiss if I did not make note of the fact that the work is replete with data on sociological aspects of the most pressing problem presently being endured by the people living in the two study areas, i.e., the moratorium on cod fishing, and that the health of some is suffering. The conclusions and recommendations that are presented will form the basis for future actions, by both government and business, that will ensure the sustainability and viability of outport Newfoundland and help to maintain a traditional way of life that is becoming all too rare in this time of "globalization" and multinational corporations and companies. It was also nice to see that the researchers accepted the idea that Traditional Ecological Knowledge is important and utilized such information in reaching their conclusions.

The strength of the present work lies more in what it doesn't say than in what it does say, with its appendices whetting the appetite for more details than does the main body of the text. It is in the latter that we can really see the magnitude of the project and the background on which the final recommendations are based, as well as the potential international ramifications of the work. Various appendices list the researchers, the Advisory Board members, students and assistants involved in the project, as well as theses completed, and refereed and non-refereed articles emerg-

ing from the research. Some figures, tables and maps in the appendices help flesh-out the text, which at times is rather dense. It should be pointed out that not all of the appendices fall into the above context, with the inclusion of a series of "Release Forms" being somewhat questionable, and the section on plants being so incomplete, as presented, as to be useless to future researchers, e.g., where is "Site 9 — Random Island, roadside ditch?"

While being a worthwhile read, although at times dull, and presenting large amounts of data, this report leaves one feeling a little frustrated in that so much has been excluded. This in itself speaks highly of the report, in that it makes one want to obtain other papers, reports and theses that contain the details alluded to but not presented in the present work. These other sources of information would flesh-out the skeleton with which we have been presented. I would recommend it to anyone who wishes to get an overview of present-day sociological and environmental conditions in Newfoundland, albeit in two well-defined geographical regions. It should also serve as a guide to people who wish to undertake such a study elsewhere, as it demonstrates that researchers in a wide variety of disciplines can work together amicably and produce a worthwhile end-product that may result in the development of sound social and environmental policies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Kathryn Welbourne. "Outports & Outlaws." *Equinox* 83 (1995), p. 34.