

The Global Family of National Trusts

by **David J. Brown** on November 5th, 2008



Most Americans spent election night in front of the television or computer. Depending on their reaction to the outcome, that may have been followed by either celebrations or a quick crawl under the covers.

But I spent the evening on a plane to Slovakia.

That seems a strange destination as winter approaches, but I was headed to an executive committee meeting of the International National Trusts Organisation (or INTO). We are being hosted by the National Trust of Slovakia in a meeting that will combine INTO internal work and outreach to this small but thriving member of the global family of National Trusts.

This is actually a two-part meeting, but the election kept me away from the first session. On November 3rd, London's Canada House – home of the Canadian High Commission – hosted an event celebrating the opening of the INTO Secretariat in that city. INTO is a network of National Trusts and similar organizations from around the world, united by their common interest in the conservation and enjoyment of our intangible and tangible heritage – both cultural and natural.

INTO's mission is

“to promote the conservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage of all nations for the benefit of the people of the world, which it aims to achieve through cooperation, coordination and comradeship between the international community of National Trusts, the development and promotion of best conservation practices, increasing the capacity of individual organizations, establishing Trusts where they do not presently exist, and advocacy in the interests of heritage conservation”.

That's an ambitious agenda. Yet it mirrors what we do every day here in America at the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States (our official name). And it only makes sense – in this increasingly interconnected global environment – to work with like-minded colleagues from non-governmental organizations to both learn and share in the effort to save the places that matter in communities across the world.

As an INTO press release reported, top Australian environmental lawyer and Chairman of INTO Simon Molesworth, speaking at the Canada House event, stressed that National Trusts are well placed to deal with economic, environmental and social change in the 21st century.

“Many people think that National Trusts are primarily concerned with the past,” noted Molesworth. ***“In fact we have to understand the world around us today and although we can't predict the future, we can explore the forces shaping change. This helps us to identify potential future unique opportunities for the National Trust movement.”***

INTO was formed in 2007, at a time when built and natural heritage all over the world is under increasing threat from neglect, environmental change, conflict and disaster. But, as INTO's Director of Finance Geoffrey Read noted, *“Increased global trade, physical and digital connections and economic change are having a growing influence on Trusts and international cooperation – the sharing of experience and knowledge, making the best use of limited resources, avoiding duplication – is becoming ever more important. This is a great opportunity for the unique skills and mindset of the National Trust movement to broaden our contribution in support of the world’s marvelous living and built heritage.”*

So over the next few days I'll be reporting through PreservationNation on what we could call “PreservationInternational.” And if you want to learn more about this new organization called INTO, check out the newly launched [web site](#). The electronic newsletters posted there are our first efforts to share the wealth of what the global National Trust community has to offer.

Does the National Trust Model Have Value in Developing Countries?

by **David J. Brown** on November 7th, 2008



Old town Bratislava.

On the first day of the annual Executive Committee meeting for the [International National Trusts Organisation](#) (INTO), more than a dozen representatives from National Trusts around the globe gathered in Bratislava, Slovakia, to focus on our work for the years ahead. INTO was established last December in a burst of celebration at the 12th International Conference of National Trusts in New Delhi, India. Since then we've hired part-time staff, engaged two high-level volunteer directors, and established an office in London.

But the hard work lies ahead. We have to take the vision and promise of INTO and translate that into an aspirational yet achievable plan that helps existing National Trusts while encouraging and supporting new organizations in countries without similar non-governmental advocacy groups.

We sat down this morning with Alex Hunt from The National Trust of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Alex has the wonderfully descriptive title “Head of Foresight” and he helped us think through what an organization made up of disparate organizations could do to be effective in the 21st century. We talked about building on the power of networks that already exist as well as ones that we help build. With the impact of the Obama campaign's transformational use of the Internet fresh on

everyone's minds, we spoke of the need for staff and leaders who were flexible, nimble, strategic, and savvy in the ways of today's communication tools. We agonized over the program priorities that would have the most impact in saving historic places.

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National Trusts in Action Around the World

by **David J. Brown** on November 10th, 2008



The Old Town area of Bratislava.

On our third and final day of meetings for the Executive Committee of the [International National Trusts Organisation \(INTO\)](#) in Bratislava, we wrapped up all the detail work that any board has to address. But after the budget was approved, annual plans reviewed, and grant proposals considered, our hosts from the National Trust of Slovakia invited us to join them in an afternoon that put all our work in perspective.

One of the reasons for meeting in Bratislava was to help reinforce the important work of the Slovakian National Trust and to provide its supporters with ideas from National Trusts around the world. So with the help of the Directorate for Education and Culture for the European Commission, the 10 National Trusts represented at the meeting joined in a symposium to demonstrate partnerships between national governments and the private or non-government organization (NGO) sector.

For four hours we heard presentations and saw photographs of how preservationists and conservationists (as we are often called in Europe) are making a real difference in people's lives. From Australia, Simon Molesworth – INTO's chairman – told how the Australian Council of National Trusts' [10 Most Endangered Historic Places](#) list was instrumental in stopping a major waterside development in North Bank, Brisbane, that would have effectively severed all connection between a historic community and its residents and the ocean that was their heritage.

[Indian National Trust](#) Chairman S.K. Misra was forceful in showing how INTACH was using heritage to provide job training, skills, and livelihoods for some of his country's most impoverished – and oldest – places. I've seen INTACH's work in person and believe that they have built a powerful program that provides critical support to help people live because they respect and support local traditions and heritage.

There were more presentations that spoke to critical work of National Trusts. [The Bermuda Trust](#) under Nicola O'Leary's leadership was working closely with local government to push consideration of the harmful affects of hotel over-building – before the hotels were built. Simon Murray of the

[National Trust in the United Kingdom](#) spoke of their pioneering work in combating climate change through good conservation practices at the vast holdings of the Trust, including 1/3 of the coast line in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Support for [best practices in land conservation on local agricultural lands in Canada](#), protection for more than 130 of the [most historic and beautiful places in The Netherlands](#), and work to [raise awareness in Ireland](#) were just other examples from a very full afternoon.

After participating in the partnership symposium, I came away convinced that we're making an important difference in the lives of people from all walks of life all around the globe. And for that all of us – whether we call ourselves preservationists or conservationists – can take a short victory lap before we return to the never-ending work at hand.

David J. Brown is Executive Vice President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.