

Why Should We Care About an International National Trust Movement? (A blog by David J Brown, Executive Vice President at the National Trust for Historic Preservation)

We have just completed a wonderful International Conference of National Trusts here in Dublin—the 13th in the history of the National Trust movement. I suspect that when a small group of Anglophiles gathered together in the 1970s in Scotland for what became the first gathering of the world’s National Trusts, they could not have imagined either the spread of their movement or the diversity of people, countries, and models that we have seen this week from among the 200+ delegates in attendance.

I’ve been fortunate to represent the National Trust for Historic Preservation at the last four conferences, and I was the chief organizer for the 2005 ICNT in Washington. Over that time, I’ve observed that this is a conference that offers something of great value to every National Trust—no matter the size or maturity of program. Here in Dublin, one only has to reflect back on the opening plenary—and the stirring call of young 16-year old [Eammon Hayes](#)—to understand that we all have much to learn.



As a representative of one of the world’s largest and richest National Trusts, I was humbled to know that we would be hard pressed to showcase any program that produced such remarkable actions by so many young people as does An Taisce’s “Green Schools” program. But I was also inspired to take that lesson back to make our work better and more effective.

From the plenary sessions on climate change and citizen empowerment to the workshops highlighting the array of activities that fall under the National Trust umbrella; from the regional discussions of how we can work more effectively through the [International National Trusts Organisation](#) (INTO) to the many opportunities for informal networking, I suspect every delegate and every organization found more than enough to enrich its work for the two years until we gather together again in Victoria, British Columbia in 2011.

The signing of the [Dublin Declaration](#) is just the first step in demonstrating what can happen when National Trusts and similar organizations with more than 5.5 million members worldwide band together. Before the day was over, delegates from around the world were describing how

the declaration had been sent to their governmental ministers and they were gathering support for its strong consideration by world leaders gathering in Copenhagen later in the year to focus on climate change. National Trust President Richard Moe has already begun to reach out to leaders in the U.S. to let them know of our stand with our sister heritage organizations around the world.

There was much to take away from Dublin, including some memorable lines from many of our speakers.

- Nicola O’Leary of the Bermuda National Trust urged “Landmarks, not Landfills”
- Tamalia Alisjahbana of Indonesia’s Foundation for the National Archives Building encouraged us all to “challenge pre-conceptions” of heritage, as she is being forced to do when one of her country’s most important national buildings is described as old, decrepit, and spooky.
- In signing a Memorandum of Understanding between INTO and Europa Nostra, the latter’s Executive President Denis De Kergorlay noted that Europe’s heritage community was taking this step because “together we are stronger.”
- Eammon Hayes challenged us to “do simple things everyday” to change the world
- And in his plenary address, our own [Richard Moe](#) reminded the group that we “can’t build our way out of the battle against climate change, we must conserve our way out.”

But INTO and this conference are not just about taking away. Much like with the environment, to keep the heritage conservation movement sustainable we must all give as well as receive. Over the course of this conference, I was busy sharing information about National Trust programs on sustainability, Main Street, and historic sites. I also had many people tell me that they were moved by my description of our simple [“This Place Matters”](#) campaign.



So we offered to set up international versions on our website, and before I left Dublin Castle today “This Place Matters” was translated into Romanian (ACEST LOC CONTEAZA), Norwegian (DETTE STEDET HAVE BETYDNING), Dutch (BELANG-RijKE PLAATS), and more! I hope in the comments section of this blog, we can have even more translations for posting on the This Place Matters page.

The depth of information and understanding brought to Dublin this week was extraordinary. The world's heritage will be the beneficiary. A sign in a Dublin-area Green School visited by INTO members this week said it best:

"Meet as Strangers, Part as Friends"

