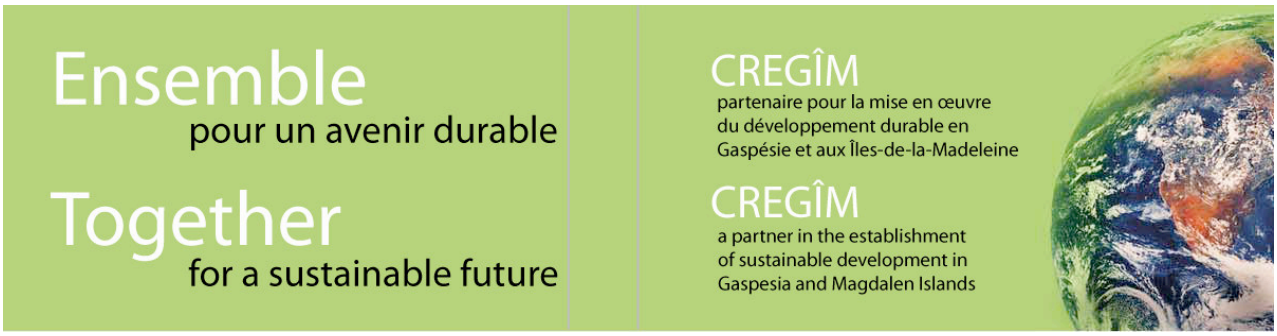

Summary of regional consultations

During the regional consultations, an incredible amount of information was gathered during the workshops where ideas were exchanged. The quality of this information has turned out to be a valuable resource. In the context of the steps taken to achieve sustainable development as part of the «Together for a sustainable future» project, a particular analysis was required. Because it is a regional project, common elements had to be identified. The Gaspesia and Magdalen Islands Region is vast and diversified. It is with this analysis and summary that a preliminary vision of sustainable development has been prepared.

This document presents a summary and analysis of the consultations through a qualitative description. This includes common issues related to sustainable development, the region's strengths and weaknesses as well as an account of the tools and measures needed to establish sustainable development. It is important to note the information used to prepare this summary comes from the consultation process and from listening to economic, social and environmental leaders and stakeholders. In an effort to best represent the entire region and to enrich the process, the same steps were taken with the Mi'gmaq, the Anglophone community and youths from the Carleton college (Centre d'études collégiale).

A Common Vision of Sustainable Development

The region hopes for things that are related to economic and social aspects for next generations and the future. The environment is also an issue, but with a view to maintaining its quality. A dozen issues related to the common vision were identified:

- Quality of life
- Quality of the scenery
- Culture
- Autonomy and self-sufficiency
- Decentralisation of decision-making
- Healthy environment
- Sustainable and coordinated harvesting of natural resources
- Maintaining and developing educational opportunities
- Attracting and keeping our youths
- Employment and employability
- Economic diversification
- Green region
- Civic involvement

There is agreement on the need for a common vision of sustainable development, as well as a change in mentality and values regarding sustainable development. Many people spoke of a return to traditional values. Confidence and respect were common values. Finally, the participants understood very well the importance of balance in achieving sustainable development.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Throughout the consultations, the strengths were much harder to identify than the weaknesses. An analysis brings us to the same conclusions. The strengths were very different from one region to the next, while the weaknesses were more consistent throughout the entire region.

The region's strengths rely mainly on the social aspects of communities, and also on the environment. When it comes to economic strengths, they are confusing and different for each sector. The only common strength is the quality of life, also identified in the vision. Of lesser importance, people also identified the pride and sense of belonging, the fact they are versatile and hard-working as well as the arrival of new Gaspesians and young retirees, solidarity, mutual aid, the strong, well-developed community structure, the quality of the environment and the quality of the scenery were mentioned many times. It is interesting to note the intercultural value that comes from the presence of Mi'gmaq and Anglophone communities was only mentioned in MRCs where they have been established for a long time.

When it comes to weaknesses, unlike in the case of strengths, they are mainly related to economic aspects. Negative social characteristics specific to the region were also identified. As for the environment, the weaknesses are linked mostly to the area's geography and natural resources. The weaknesses on a regional scale regard the lack of a common vision and regional uniqueness as well as low population density (and many unpopulated areas). There is also a lack of employment and low wage jobs, the centralisation of decision-making (at both the provincial and regional level within the MRCs), a defeatist attitude or lack of positive thinking, the out-migration of our youths and finally the seasonal reality of many jobs and the seasonal work mentality.

Establishing Sustainable Development

The objective was to identify the means and tools to tangibly establish sustainable development in Gaspesia and Magdalen Islands. This would also have identified current projects and successes. The first thing discovered is that sustainable development has already begun. However, the steps taken, as well as those being developed, are difficult to identify. Often, they are not perceived to be sustainable development. Also, the establishment of sustainable development is seen as something huge. It's all or nothing. Yet it is by doing it one step at a time that it can be established.

Those who participated in the consultations brought up important issues leading to a common vision of sustainable development at the regional level. The region's weaknesses are easily identified, which is not the case of its strengths. Everybody agrees on the pertinence of the principles of sustainable development and on the need for a corresponding vision. The challenge will be in its establishment; how it will take shape is confusing. This is normal, as it is the biggest challenge to achieving sustainable development. We will succeed *Together*.