

# The Strategy of Cultivating Lifestyle Entrepreneurs and Amenity Movers through Most Beautiful Village Associations

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## 1. Introduction

Although the total world population is increasing by some 80 million people each year, the pace of that increase has been steadily declining, most dramatically in more developed countries (Ashford, 2004; World Population Highlights, p.1). Among these developed countries, Japan is often cited in demographic studies due to the combination of its low birth rate and high life expectancy. In recent years, population growth in Japan has come to an almost standstill, mainly due to a natural increase rate that has dropped close to zero. And as Japan's low birth rate and high number of deaths due to an aging population cause the natural increase rate to eventually turn negative in the coming years, this will cause the population to steadily decline for the unforeseeable future. Partly as a result of this, a trend has emerged in Japan in recent years where the Japanese government has been consolidating more and more local towns and villages. Many fear that this massive wave of consolidation will lead to small towns and villages losing their identity, so a group of town and village mayors have come together to form the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan to try to vitalize rural areas. However, the association that was recently formed in Japan was not the first of its kind. Associations had already been formed in such countries as France, Belgium, Italy and Canada due to the same concerns that citizens have for rural areas in their own countries.

The main focus of this paper will be to explore the strategy of creating Most Beautiful Village associations as a way to revitalize stagnating rural areas through the cultivation of lifestyle entrepreneurs and amenity movers in these areas. First, a brief outline of Most Beautiful Village associations in France, Belgium and Italy will be given, as well as the most recently formed association in Japan. This will then be followed by an in-depth analysis of the author's findings while conducting field research in Quebec, Canada to gain more insight on the workings of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec. This chapter will then be followed by the author's conclusions and final thoughts.

## 2. Outline of Most Beautiful Village Associations in France, Belgium, and Italy

### a. France

In 1982, Charles Ceyrac, Lord Mayor of Collonges-la-Rouge in the province of Correze, noticed that some of the many villages of France had been spared by the uncontrolled development of cities and had

remained protected. To support the evolution and notoriety of these small villages, which had very often been overlooked and neglected, he decided to bring together the villages in the form of an Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France (known as "L'Association Les Plus Beaux Villages de France" in French). His goal was to preserve, renovate, and promote the exceptional natural resources and valuable heritage of local villages on a national scale. Essentially the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France is a trademark which gathers 149 villages in a national network and was the first of its kind ever created. All villages have in common their location in the countryside as well as a natural patrimony (i.e. the art, natural resources, valuable objects, etc. of an area) and/or exceptional architecture. The goal of the association is to preserve, promote and enhance those characteristics. France's association aims to avoid the trap of soulless, dead villages scattered throughout the country that have been turned into museums and that are slowly sinking into oblivion.

To qualify for admission to the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France, municipalities must have less than 2,000 residents. Criteria for admission to the association is strict and includes 27 different points, some of which include: 1) the value and diversity of the patrimony, 2) the quality of the architecture, town planning and environment, and 3) a common will (from the local government down to the shopkeepers and inhabitants themselves) to create excellence in the village. Among the different evaluation criteria that have been established, the association focuses on overall village quality as being the most important. To complete one's registration as a member of the association, each village must comply with the association's "Quality Charter." From that point on, the association itself controls village renovation plans and its development. Once every five years, a meeting of experts either confirms or cancels the classification (i.e. status) of each village.

The association shares with its members successful experiences which have taken place in villages, provides expert advice, and takes the lead in communication action to increase the notoriety of the association as well as each of its individual member villages. Some of the villages have already become renowned world-wide, with others most likely to become so as word-of-mouth spreads. In addition, the association has been granted an exclusive license in cooperation with France's "Come To Paris ? Come To France" tourist initiative, which has allowed it to implement the tourist development of the villages according to its own strict quality requirements. Stays and trips have been set up with village inhabitants who want to share the passion they have for their particular village with visitors. Thus visitors can have a unique "local" experience that is not afforded to average tourists that come to France on pre-packaged tours.

In summary, the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France aims to transform the villages affiliated with its association into places of excellence, while at the same time enhancing their identity as well as their diversity. By using the image and notoriety of the association, it is hoped that a new and stronger economy will be able to be built in each of the villages. This "new" economy is one that is based on a partnership between local community members and the French people as a whole, as well as visitors from abroad. It emphasizes the discovery of a living heritage area and the hospitality that these local villages have to offer. Since it was first established in 1982, the association has patiently built a

new form of national interaction among municipalities. It has successfully contributed to making rural France become a place of envy on the world stage, although most would admit that even now rural France still suffers from an image problem and a lack of identification by the consumer. The Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France hopes to keep changing that image gradually in the future.

#### b. Belgium (Wallony Region)

The Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Wallonia (known as "L'Association Les Plus Beaux Villages de Wallonie" in French) was founded in Belgium in 1994. It was the second association to be formed, after France's association was initially formed in 1982. Belgium's association is a non-profit one that organizes various activities in its 21 member villages. To be eligible for membership in the association, villages must have rural character, one or more listed monuments, and an architectural and valuable culture heritage.

The association's mark is composed of a winding road that leads to what appears to be a church with a high steeple. In addition, there are several red flowers and a lot of green bushes and plants along the road leading to the church. All of these things are symbolic of a small, beautiful village.

Among the 21 member villages, some of the most noteworthy are: 1) Celles (Houyet), which is nestled within a small valley. The village is proud of its 11th century Romanesque church of Saint Hadelin, which is an excellent example of the Mosan architecture style; 2) Fagnolle (Philippeville), a modest limestone village nestled on the hillside to the south of Philippeville. Its harmonious 18th century charm has been almost entirely preserved; 3) Laforet (Vresse-On-Semois) is nestled in a hollow in the Ardennes forest between the peaks of Mt. Haye and Mt. Les Rochettes. The village is not easy to see in its entirety, but comes into sight as you walk down towards the Semois. More detailed information about the various villages can be found at <http://www.pbvw.be> (available in French and English).

#### c. Italy

[In-depth information about each of the villages (available in Italian and English) can be found at: <http://www.borghitalia.it/>]

The Association of Most Beautiful Villages in Italy (known "I Borghi Più Bella d'Italia" in Italian) was formed in March 2001 through the incentive of the Tourism Council of the ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities). According to the association's president Fiorella Primi on its official website, the association was formed "from the need to promote the great heritage of history, art, culture, environment, and traditions found in small Italian towns which are, for the most part, cut off from the flow of visitors and tourists. There are in fact hundreds of small villages in Italy that risk depopulation and a consequent decline caused by a situation of marginalization due to economic interests that gravitate toward tourism and commercial trends. Thus it was decided to establish an association that brings together the needs of those wise administrators who are most sensitive to the protection and promotion of the villages and who believe in and will participate actively in such an important and challenging association."

Before being accepted into the association, villages are carefully screened by a committee composed

of 17 members (which includes the association's president, treasurer, and a head of organization and relations) on a number of areas, such as architectural harmony and the quality of the public and private buildings, as well as the quality of life in the villages themselves in terms of activities and services provided for their inhabitants. As with other Most Beautiful Village associations, initial admission into Italy's association does not guarantee being allowed to stay in it. Villages must show their commitment to increasing their quality through concrete actions and practices.

As stated on its website, the goal of the association is to guarantee the preservation of a great heritage of monuments and memories, which would otherwise be irretrievably lost, through four key concepts: protection, restoration, promotion, and utilization. The association considers its member villages as part of a "smaller" Italy that although is more hidden and less known, best represents the history of local places in Italy that have been cut off from development and modernization at all costs.

Although many might question the need for an Most Beautiful Villages association in an era where there are a large number of books and amount of information available on the history and traditions of Italy, Leonardo Dominici, mayor of Florence and ANCI President, is convinced that no one can describe the beauty of the villages in the association better than the local villagers themselves. He is proud that for once, it will not be outsiders who "discover" and propose the beauty of a particular town, but rather the association itself. According to Dominici, "the basic of concept of the club [association] is simple yet ambitious: it wishes to 'sell' the village to the tourist and visitor, and at the same time it aims at improving the overall quality of life there. And thus [do] away with ugliness, additions, incompatible things, all the while bearing in mind that a town is not a museum. In this way the beneficiaries of the improved quality of life will be not only the tourists and visitors, but above all those people who have made the choice to continue living and working in the village."

In conclusion, scientific committee member Claudio Bacilieri captures the essence of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Italy by commenting: "The value of beauty lies in its power to guide us: just a stone's throw from home, there are worlds that we don't know; we have the opportunity to go on truly 'exotic' vacations, far from the stereotypes of mass tourism. An alternative to the 'non-places' in town, anonymous and alike everywhere ? and an alternative life, because to paraphrase Pound, to proceed slowly is beauty."

### 3. Formation of Association in Japan <sup>1</sup>

After the successful launches of Most Beautiful Village associations in France, Italy, Belgium and Canada, Japan has recently created an association of its own. The opening ceremony for the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan was held in Biei Town, Hokkaido, on October 4, 2005 (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 10/05/2005, p.39). A total of seven villages located throughout Japan were inducted as charter members of the association. Below is a brief description of each of the seven villages<sup>2</sup> :

- 1) Biei Town, Hokkaido Prefecture: Known as "the town of hills." Especially known for its landscapes and year-round beautiful colors. Used as the set for the filming of many famous TV commercials and

TV dramas.

- 2) Akaigawa Village, Hokkaido Prefecture: Surrounded by mountains and known as “the land of the caldera.” Characterized by an abundant amount of nature, plants and animals. Many visitors spend an enjoyable time at the Kiroro Resort located in the village.
- 3) Okura Village, Yamagata Prefecture: Famous for its delicious soba [buckwheat noodles], the largest snowman in Japan during winter, and its simple yet classy and colorful Japanese-style inns. The village’s collection of tanada [terraced rice paddy fields] that are lodged between the mountains were selected as one of the 100 best in Japan.
- 4) Shirakawa Village, Gifu Prefecture: A world heritage site that is well known throughout the world for its characteristic houses built with a steep rafter roof. The village is surrounded by lush forests and rice paddies. Recently there has been a large increase in the number of visitors to the village from abroad.
- 5) Oshika Village, Nagano Prefecture: Located at a high elevation in between several mountains. Known for its traditional Oshika kabuki theatre, as well as the 3,000 sakura [cherry blossom] trees and many other types of flowers that bloom in the village every year.
- 6) Kamikatsu Town, Tokushima Prefecture: The town showcases the best of Japanese cuisine throughout the whole year and is famous for the leaves changing color in autumn at Tonogawauchi Canyon located in the town. The beautiful colors and contoured shapes of the town’s tanada [terraced rice paddy fields] offer a stunning view to visitors.
- 7) Minami Oguni Town, Kumamoto Prefecture: Most well-known for its large number of hot springs collectively known as a group as the “Kurokawa Hot Springs.” Also has several national monuments and a vast amount of natural amenities, including spatial areas of high plains and clean, delicious water.

The following is a brief outline of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan:

#### Main Objectives

The association has three main objectives, those being:

- 1) Develop activities that will help preserve agricultural areas with a low population density.
- 2) Convey the appeal of small town life to the whole country and work for the stimulation of local economies by increasing the number of tourists to these areas.
- 3) Encourage promotional and public relations activities that help raise public awareness for the current situation facing rural villages.

#### Purpose for the Formation of the Association

The main purpose behind the formation of the association was to convey the attraction of local areas and highlight recent trends in these areas. Association committee members believe that it is precisely because the populations of villages are small that they have become attractive places that can soothe the hearts of people. Spending free time in rural villages by doing such things as “green tourism” has become an increasingly important type of “status” for those living in the city. Furthermore, in Japan, as

is the case with many other countries, having beautiful scenery has become a catalyst for increasing the brand image of a rural village.

The committee's reasons for wanting to create an official association were diverse. First of all, through the formation of an association, efforts to disseminate information would be strengthened, as well as confidence in the information that is distributed. Secondly, it would become much easier to increase public awareness of efforts to preserve rural villages with the formation of an association that is composed of people who share this common goal. In addition, mutual learning and exchange of ideas can occur between associations that have been formed around the world, and activities at the local level using a global point of view can be fostered.

#### Admission Criteria

To be considered for entrance into the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan, municipalities need to meet the following main criteria:

- 1) Have less than 10,000 residents.
- 2) Have a population density of less than 50 people per square kilometer.
- 3) Have superior aspects in at least two of the following three categories: scenery, environment, and culture.
- 4) Be conducting town development that takes into consideration the area's beautiful scenery.
- 5) Contain a natural heritage site and/or architectural heritage that is representative of Japan.
- 6) Local residents feel a sense of pride in their village and are willingly conducting activities that promote regional development.

#### Potential Problematic Issues

Two potential problem points with association guidelines have been pointed out thus far by committee members. The first one has to do with the population restriction of 10,000 residents. This number was chosen because it is the current approximate population of Biei Town in Hokkaido Prefecture, which is the town that spearheaded efforts to create a Most Beautiful Village association in Japan. Many worry that villages worthy of inclusion into the association will be excluded simply because of their size. The other problem area is related to the association's insistence that only villages that have declared that they will not consolidate with other villages can be considered for admission into the association. There have already been several cases of villages in Japan that have managed to keep their strong traditions of preserving their local communities even after becoming consolidated with other villages in the immediate area. As is the case with the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec, it might be best to consider villages for admission to the association independently, regardless of whether they already have consolidated with other villages or are planning to do so in the near future.

#### Sponsorship

The association has also actively looked for companies and institutions of higher education that are willing to support the association. Companies such as Calbee Foods Co., Ltd. and Ina Food Industrial Co., Ltd. have already pledged their support. In addition, one major agricultural machinery

manufacturer is currently reviewing the prospect of supporting the association as part of its commitment to “building a more beautiful Japan” which is contained in its CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) guidelines.

Company sponsorship can have mutual benefits for both the association and the company itself. The fact that member villages have already been selected for membership into the association because of their high quality standards makes it easier for companies to sponsor the association and member villages themselves because of the “quality seal” attached to the association. Similarly, if villages that are currently experiencing financial distress see that there are companies out there willing to sponsor the association, that fact makes it easier for those villages to consider applying for membership into the association.

#### Future Plans/Strategy

Although the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan was started with just seven member villages, this is seen by committee members as simply the first stage in a long journey. Just as the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France plans to expand the number of its member villages from its current 149 to approximately 240, Japan’s association also plans to expand the number of villages in its association as time progresses. Committee members currently envision creating two separate divisions of the association, with the first division consisting of villages and towns that are recognized at the government level and that have less than 10,000 residents. They feel that approximately 30 is an appropriate number of towns and villages for inclusion in the first division. Admission to the second division would be based more on the criteria set by the Most Beautiful Village associations located in Europe, such as only including villages and towns that have a population of around 500-2,000 residents. But because of the recent wave of consolidation of smaller towns and villages in Japan<sup>3)</sup>, it is becoming harder and harder to find places that have such small populations. Thus committee members are feeling a sense of emergency regarding many rural areas in Japan losing their identity due to consolidation. Although the committee cannot stop the government from continuing its consolidation plans, they hope to preserve the identity of smaller rural community areas by including them in its second division.

Ultimately, association organizers envision an association network (“community”) with 30 first division members along side several hundred member villages in the second division that all help to promote a new style of cooperation among villages, government, industry and academia. Especially for those corporations that are increasingly aware of the issue of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), as well as universities and other institutions of higher learning that are looking for ways to hookup with their local communities, the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan offers a way for these groups to give something back to their communities. Finally, the association hopes that its creation will help to spread the word about beautiful rural areas in Japan and lead to an increase in repeat visitors to member villages, which in turn will revitalize their local economies and hopefully spur an increase in the number of people who make I-turiv/J-turns to these areas as amenity movers.

#### 4. In-Depth Analysis of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec

The author conducted field research in Quebec from June 10, 2005 to June 18, 2005 to get a better grasp of the real workings behind the association through talking with association president Mr. Jean-Marie Girardville, as well as to see first-hand as many member villages as possible. Following is an account of what the author discovered about the association during the course of his stay.

##### a. History of the Association and General Info

###### Establishment

The Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec (a province located in the eastern part of Canada) is a network of authentic heritage villages located in remarkable landscapes that was founded in 1997 by current association president Mr. Jean-Marie Girardville on the basis of the French model of "L'Association des Plus Beaux Villages de France" ("The Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France")<sup>4</sup>. Following the formation of a working committee, Quebec's association was incorporated in August 1998 with 18 villages becoming members during the first phase of selections. As of 2005, the association has 32 member villages in 10 regions located throughout Quebec.

Girardville was born in France and still goes there often because one of his two sons lives there. He worked for 20 years at Tourism Quebec and has traveled extensively in Quebec both for work and pleasure. During his time at Tourism Quebec, Girardville was encouraged by others to make an association that is similar to the one in France in order to preserve the villages of Quebec, which he feels cannot be directly compared to those of France mainly because he believes money is destroying everything in France and that commercial development there is quite poor, as well as the fact that France has a lot of regional and national architectural regulations (such as for materials, size, etc.).

About half of the villages have an architectural integration plan and residents must submit wanted changes to a local committee for approval. However, not all villages have such a committee, so the association has a quality charter in place to hold all member villages to the same high standards. Also helping to keep quality standards high is the "Towns, Villages of Art and Heritage in Quebec" association that is controlled by the Tourism Association of Quebec. Some of the villages are members of the association. The government pays half of association employee salaries and member municipalities pay the other half.

###### Financial Operations

In terms of how the association funds its operations, it is mainly through the yearly fee collected from member villages, which was \$150 per year up until 2005, when it was increased to \$200 per year<sup>5</sup>. This increase in the annual fee was justified by the fact that the association currently has all volunteer workers and so that makes it difficult to carry out operations. Currently no taxpayer money is used to fund operations. When the association was first formed, the government of Quebec gave its support in the form of a \$4,000 donation by Tourism Quebec, the official tourist information organization of Quebec. However, this was only a one-time subsidy intended to help the association get off on the right foot. The association was frugal in its first years of operation and was able to save a majority of the original amount to help pay for half the cost of a new association pamphlet that was created in 2005.



However, rather than receive money from the government, Girardville would much rather receive technical support, such as when Tourism Quebec paid for journalists to go around to several villages to tour them and then subsequently write articles about them. Reference to the association on Tourism Quebec's website (BoujourQuebec.com) has led to many inquiries about the association. In addition, the association's trademark is found in descriptions of member villages in all regional guidebooks, which is an advantage for both the association and the villages themselves because it serves as a "quality seal" for readers of the guidebooks.

Currently, the association does not receive any support from the Canadian national government because the government is on too big of a scale and only supports national projects. If the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec were to expand nationally, this situation might change. In fact, Girardville would like to see Ontario<sup>6</sup> and Nova Scotia make similar Most Beautiful Village associations, but he has no intention to "merge" with any such created association because the cultures in those provinces are quite different. According to Girardville, Nova Scotia has a lot of fishing villages and Ontario is like "another world" with very different architecture, etc. Instead, he hopes that Ontario and Nova Scotia will someday make their own associations and then possibly form a national federation together with Quebec's association.

The association does not currently receive any support from any companies either. Girardville sent out requests to companies in several different sectors, such as electric companies, banks, and even hardware stores, but all denied his request for support. Although companies do support local festivals, not only does Girardville not have enough time to keep re-asking companies to financially support the association, but often times there are too many conditions to getting such support (e.g. the association having to put a company's logo on all official materials), so he thinks the association is probably better off not having company support anyway since he doesn't want the association to become too "commercialized."

#### Logo Image

In regard to the association's logo image, there is a Catholic church and steeple (that as a set symbolizes the typical architecture found in Quebec), green trees, a river<sup>7</sup>, and a lily flower on the right-hand side, which is a symbol of French kings (as seen in each of the four corners of the Quebec flag). Also symbolic in the logo image are a plow symbolizing agriculture, and a (farm) house symbolizing the inhabitants of each village.

#### Guidebooks/Publicity

The association does not currently publish a magazine and has no plans to do so in the near future. Most information is disseminated through the Internet. In the past the association had put together two or three newsletters, but now it uses e-mail exclusively because all member villages have access to the Internet. A general map of the area that encompasses member villages and a new pamphlet that was created in 2005 are available at tourist information areas and upon request. Mr. Yves LaFramboise, one of the members of the association's executive committee, has authored a successful book that has sold 35,000 copies in Quebec alone entitled "Villages Pittoresques Du Quebec" (picturesque villages of

Quebec]. The book has 80 percent of current member villages contained in it, so the association has no intentions to make another book that is culturally orientated. Reader's Digest has published a book of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France, but there is just a short description of each village and it is more tourist-oriented (i.e. lists good restaurants, famous sightseeing areas. etc.). whereas LaFramboise's book has more cultural details written about each village, such as who founded it, specific details about the architecture of particular buildings, etc.

### Village Economy/Tourism

Tourists visiting the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec come from a variety of countries. Although no official count has been conducted, Girardville believes that besides a large number of tourists coming from other provinces in Canada, a large majority of tourists are coming from the United States (the New England states in particular) and France.

As for employment in the villages, because most of the villages have small populations and are located in rural areas, it comes as no surprise that agriculture is a big part of the life of residents. Most of the agricultural activities that are carried out in the villages are food products, with such products as fruits, vegetables, and maple syrup being especially dominant. There is very few livestock on village farms.

In addition to food products, many different types of crafts are sold in the villages, such as jewelry, hand-made crafts (wood sculptures, etc.), tablecloths, linens, ceramics, wool-knitted socks, candles/soap, and jams. Special products that can be found in select villages include raw milk cheeses, and "econo-museums" where products and crafts are made and explained to visitors. As an example of the latter, there is a chocolate econo-museum located in Old Quebec City.

Although agriculture dominates the economy of most villages, it should be noted that over time more and more villagers have come to rely to a large extent on tourism for their livelihood, especially as evidenced by the large number of new bed and breakfast (B&B) places that have sprung up over the last few years. As a matter of fact, most visitors to member association villages will notice that a majority of the lodging accommodations are not hotels, but rather B&Bs that add to the charm of the villages.

The tiny village of Kamouraska (population: 750) is an example of a village that has seen its economy change drastically over the years. Its economy used to be based mainly on fishing, but now there are only two families remaining in the village that do it for their living. Most residents in Kamouraska now commute to La Pocatiere, a neighboring village located about 20 minutes away by car, to work at the train wagon building factory there. Due to Kamouraska's burgeoning reputation as an ideal tourist destination, many villagers have opened up their own shops as lifestyle entrepreneurs as well.

### Village Events

There are some local annual village events, such as artistic events where painters come to paint the beautiful scenery, especially during the autumn in September and October, and then sell the paintings they have just created to both tourists and locals alike. This kind of event has been gaining in popularity in recent years. And so although there are not many "festivals" per se, there are still several local events that are not geared toward tourists.

### Future Plans for the Association

Girardville plans to conduct a survey in a few years to check up on the situation in each of the villages, ask residents about their feelings toward being a member village, and gather more concrete data on the number of tourists who are visiting each village. The association also plans to add more member villages in the coming years. Mr. Girardville has expressed keen interest in trying to get more villages to join the association, but two or three villages he has been in contact with are not interested because private citizens who control the municipal council in those villages fear that becoming a member of the association will cause too much publicity and also encourage too many new people to move to their villages. These private citizens place a high value on their privacy, so until now they have rebuffed efforts by Girardville to get them to join the association.

Girardville also has commented that it is quite obvious to him that more and more people are looking for authenticity because everywhere is starting to look the same due to the “commercialization” of both big and small towns alike. He feels that this fact will bode well for the future of the association because it is the only one of its kind in Quebec and at the same time it has gained a reputation for its insistence on letting only high quality, authentic villages become members.

### **b. Admission Process and Membership Status**

#### Application Process

For villages to become a member of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec, they must first apply to have their village evaluated by sending in a non-refundable \$100 fee. Once the fee has been received, the two-person team of Girardville (associate president) and LaFramboise (a specialist in authenticity and architectural historian who has written a book on traditional houses and architecture in Quebec) travel to the village to evaluate it using a pre-determined 100-point system that was created by the joint efforts of Girardville and LaFramboise.

#### Evaluation Criteria

The 100-point system is composed of the following three broad categories: quality of location (20 points), quality of architecture (50 points), and quality of planning (30 points). A breakdown of the specific criteria for each category is outlined below:

#### *Quality of Location (20 points)*

- 1) What is the overall beauty of the location?
- 2) Are there any spectacular, majestic spots?
- 3) Is the location an original (i.e. preserved), typical, and representative village?
- 4) What are the harmonious and clashing elements?
- 5) Is there access to panoramic viewpoints?
- 6) Is there public access to bodies of water?
- 7) How much sunlight is there?
- 8) What is the overall quality of the landscape at close range? Are there any flaws with it?

*Quality of Architecture → heritage and architectural importance (20 points)*

- 1) Is there a strong presence of heritage elements? In what quantity?
- 2) What is the concentration of heritage elements, in terms of their density and arrangement?
- 3) Is there diversity in the style of architecture?

*Quality of Architecture → maintenance and conservation (10 points)*

- 1) What is the level of overall maintenance of the village?
- 2) What is the overall maintenance of the public and private buildings, including their cleanliness?

*Quality of Architecture → heritage and architectural quality (20 points)*

- 1) What are the authenticity, preservation and accentuation of the architectural elements?
- 2) What is the level of originality, representation, and heritage designation of the architecture?
- 3) What is the level of architectural integration, in terms of size, styles, colors, and materials?

*Quality of Planning → planning of public and private property (20 points)*

- 1) What is the level of integration of urban commodities, such as parking lots, electric power lines, and public street lighting?
- 2) What is the overall integrity of the village?
- 3) What is the level of quality, beauty, and subtlety of the signs and postings in the village?
- 4) What is the quality of the planning of public and private property regarding such things as landscape planning, floral planning, and maintenance of squares, parks, and waterfront areas?

*Quality of Planning → balance of functions (10 points)*

- 1) What is the level of respect for the principles of long-term sustainable development?
- 2) What is level of balance and diversity of functions?
- 3) What is the level of control of commercial development?

Although there is currently no population limit listed in the evaluation criteria, the association does not view villages that have over 5,000 residents as truly being "villages," and this fact does somewhat negatively affect the chances of larger villages and towns being accepted. The average population of all current member villages is approximately 1,000 residents.

After Girardville and LaFramboise have evaluated a village, the seven members of the association's administrative committee (consisting of Girardville, LaFramboise, and five village representatives currently composed of four mayors and one citizen) decide to either approve or decline the village's application for acceptance into the association. The association does not share specific notes taken during a village's evaluation with the villages themselves because they do not feel it is appropriate to do so. However, they do give general comments of what they think the villages can improve on, especially those villages which were not accepted into the association.

Thus far the association has accepted the applications of 32 villages (Table 1) and rejected 20 villages (Table 2). Although it is difficult to make sweeping conclusions about why certain villages were accepted while others were not, several noticeable trends between the two groups can be ascertained from analyzing the scores of all of the evaluated villages. First and foremost, the group of villages that have been accepted thus far have a much higher quality of architecture score (average: 37.1) versus

Table 1: Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec-  
Scores of Villages Accepted as of August 2005

Village	Part 1 - Quality of location (20)	Heritage and architectural importance (20)	Maintenance and conservation (10)	Heritage and architectural quality (20)	Part 2 - Quality of Architecture (50)	Planning of public and private property (20)	Balance of functions (10)	Part 3 - Quality of planning (30)	Total = Parts 1+2+3 (100)
A	18	14	6	12	32	15	7	22	72
B	14	17	7	15	39	17	8	25	78
C	19	17	8	17	42	18	8	26	87
D	15	14	6	14	34	14	7	21	70
E	14	15	8	13	36	17	8	25	75
F	17	16	8	16	40	16	7	23	80
G	15	17	8	17	42	16	9	25	82
H	16	16	7	15	38	16	9	25	79
I	19	14	7	13	34	16	7	23	76
J	15	16	7	14	37	14	7	21	73
K	17	15	8	12	35	16	8	24	76
L	18	16	9	16	41	17	7	24	83
M	14	14	8	14	36	16	5	21	71
N	15	15	8	15	38	16	7	23	76
O	15	14	6	14	34	15	8	23	72
P	19	18	8	18	44	17	8	25	88
Q	18	18	7	17	42	15	9	24	84
R	17	14	7	14	35	14	6	20	72
S	18	16	6	17	39	13	5	18	75
T	17	18	8	15	41	17	7	24	82
U	16	18	7	17	42	17	8	25	83
V	18	13	6	13	32	14	8	22	72
W	15	15	7	14	36	14	7	21	72
X	17	13	6	13	32	15	7	22	71
Y	15	14	8	13	35	16	5	21	71
Z	20	11	7	10	28	16	8	24	72
AA	19	15	7	15	37	14	7	21	77
BB	15	15	7	14	36	14	7	21	72
CC	17	15	5	14	34	13	8	21	72
DD	14	18	8	17	43	17	8	25	82
EE	18	17	9	17	43	17	7	24	85
FF	20	18	7	13	38	13	3	16	74
GG*	18	14	7	13	34	14	7	21	73
HH*	14	15	6	13	34	17	6	23	71
Average	16.6	15.4	7.2	14.5	37.1	15.5	7.1	22.6	76.4

\* Denotes a village that was initially accepted but declined the invitation to join the association

Source: "Feuille de Pointage des Plus Beaux Villages du Quebec" (Point Scorecard  
for the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec) provided by Mr. Jean-Marie Girardville



Table 2: Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec-  
Scores of Villages Rejected as of August 2005

Village	Part 1 - Quality of location (20)	Heritage and architectural importance (20)	Maintenance and conservation (10)	Heritage and architectural quality (20)	Part 2 - Quality of Architecture (50)	Planning of public and private property (20)	Balance of functions (10)	Part 3 - Quality of planning (30)	Total = Parts 1+2+3 (100)
A	13	12	7	12	31	14	7	21	65
B	19	12	7	10	29	13	6	19	67
C	14	14	6	13	33	15	6	21	68
D	15	12	5	10	27	12	5	17	59
E	12	12	6	12	30	13	8	21	63
F	16	14	6	13	33	12	6	18	67
G	16	12	6	11	29	13	6	19	64
H	15	17	6	12	35	13	6	19	69
I	16	14	6	11	31	14	7	21	68
J	17	14	6	11	31	16	5	21	69
K	16	10	5	9	24	10	5	15	55
L	17	10	8	10	28	15	6	21	66
M	19	11	5	11	27	12	8	20	66
N	18	11	6	11	28	11	7	18	64
O	10	8	7	8	23	14	7	21	54
P	15	11	7	11	29	13	6	19	63
Q	16	14	5	14	33	13	6	19	68
R	12	10	6	10	26	10	6	16	54
S	13	12	7	12	31	14	8	22	66
T	18	12	6	11	29	11	7	18	65
Average	15.4	12.1	6.2	11.1	29.4	12.9	6.4	19.3	64.0

Source: "Feuille de Pointage des Plus Beaux Villages du Quebec" (Point Scorecard for the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec) provided by Mr. Jean-Marie Girardville

their rejected counterparts (average: 29.4). It is worthwhile to note that the lowest score in this category for an accepted village was 32, well above the average score of the rejected villages. Similarly, the highest score in this category for a rejected village was 35, below the average score of the accepted villages. Looking closer at the quality of architecture scores for its three sub-categories, it is clear that the importance (accepted villages=15.4 versus rejected villages=12.1) and quality (14.5 versus 11.1) of a village's heritage and architecture plays a larger role in whether it is accepted than the maintenance and conservation of its architecture (7.2 versus 6.2).

Further stressing the importance of architecture to a village's prospects of becoming a member of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec is the fact that there are not large scoring differentials between the two groups in the other two categories, quality of location" (16.6 versus 15.4) and quality of planning (22.6 versus 19.3). However, it should be noted that the planning of public and private property sub-category of quality of planning shows a fairly substantial difference in average

scores between the two groups (15.5 versus 12.9). This implies that not only a village's architecture, but also the quality of its public and private lands, which includes such aspects as landscape planning, maintenance of parks and waterfront areas, etc., is of large importance to the evaluation committee.

### Membership Status

Once a village has been accepted for admittance into the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec, there is no guarantee that it will be allowed to stay in the association indefinitely. Details for maintaining membership in the association are outlined in the association's articles (general regulations). According to Girardville, although the association is still too young to actively pursue expelling member villages from the association, the association's administration committee reviews the current condition of the villages on a yearly basis. If the overall quality of any one village becomes substantially different than when it was first accepted for membership into the association, the committee will issue a warning to the village outlining what infractions to the association's rules it believes the village has committed. After this warning has been given, the member village will be let out of the association if there is no noticeable improvement within a year.

Although no villages have been expelled from the association thus far, there has recently been an example of a village that is close to becoming expelled. In the past few years, the population of Vercheres, a village located near Montreal in the southern part of Quebec province, has risen to around 5,000 residents. Many new high-rise buildings have been erected in the village. In addition, a large number of trees have been cut down and the river that runs through the town has been essentially "hidden" by the construction of many new buildings. The mayor of Vercheres has essentially let developers do anything they want to do in the village for the sake of economic development because the governments of small villages are usually quite pleased to see companies relocate to their villages due to the creation of new jobs. But as a consequence to Vercheres' rapid expansion, many residents of the village, as well as visitors, have become upset and have written correspondence to the association asking for help. It has become a distinct possibility that Vercheres will be expelled from the association as early as the end of 2005, although Girardville has been in contact with the mayor of Vercheres and is trying his best to remedy the situation before it comes down to that.

With the recent wave of villages merging in Quebec province for both economic and political reasons, another problematic issue regarding membership status has arisen for the association. That is what to do when a member village merges with a non-member village. According to Girardville, if two or more villages merge, with one having been a Most Beautiful Village before the merger, the new entity doesn't necessarily become a Most Beautiful Village. In other words, the association has nothing to do with politics since the association focuses on the "human community" aspect of villages, not the "political community" aspect of them. This is done because the government can change the classifications of villages at any time.

In the case that two member villages merge with each other, it is the association's policy to keep them separated to preserve their unique identities. An example of this is Saint Joseph de La Rive and Les Eboulements, two villages that merged two years ago and are now actually one government entity.

Even though Les Eboulements is now the official name, it pays two fees to keep Saint Joseph de La Rive listed as a separate village.

### **c. Possible Drawbacks to Membership**

Although becoming a member village of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec definitely has many obvious positive aspects to it, there are some potential drawbacks (i.e. problematic points) for member villages that can arise on a case by case basis. For example, according to the former mayor of St. Petronille, a member village that is located very close to Quebec City, problems he encountered with B&Bs (bed and breakfast establishments) during his time of office included: 1) often times adults staying at the local B&Bs caused a ruckus at night and/or their children ran around creating a disturbance to the neighbors, 2) local residents often lost their sense of privacy because the visitors walking around the village are "too friendly," and 3) he feels the large signs advertising B&Bs in some places are gaudy.

Another issue of contention for him was the fact that during his time as mayor he wanted to have all the houses be white because of the village's 200-year history. However, the new mayor who is in office now changed that policy simply because he wanted to appease residents of the village. The mayor strongly feels that the old traditions of the village should be respected and preserved.

During his time in office, the former mayor's goal was to preserve the community as best he could. At the time, the two major local meeting places in the village had been the two local grocery stores. However, since then they have both been closed and one has been turned into a souvenir shop and the other into a restaurant, a fact he laments because he feels there is now much less communication among residents.

Although not a problem he himself faced while the mayor of St. Petronille, he knows of a case where there are currently 300 people living in a relatively-rich municipality that has a factory or company in it, and another municipality neighboring it that has 2,000 residents and all the major services (hospital, fire station, police, etc.) in the area. Since the smaller of the two municipalities uses the services in the larger municipality even though they are not paying taxes for the provision of them, the larger village has become resentful of its smaller neighbor. This in turn has caused friction between the two municipalities and is one of the main factors behind the recent wave of consolidation of municipalities in Quebec province.

The former mayor of St. Petronille also believes that contrary to popular belief, growing (i.e. economic development) is not necessarily a good thing. He points out that the amount of tax received from the influx of new residents often does not cover the cost of new services that need to be provided for those new residents, such as schools, hospitals, etc. Most people do not realize this fact and blindly support initiatives that have the aim of accelerating growth in the municipalities, which he feels can be a costly mistake.

### **d. Keys to Building a Successful Most Beautiful Villages Association**

According to Girardville, there are several points that should be considered to help make a Most Beautiful Villages association be the best it can possibly be. First of all, when first starting up an



association, it is important to have a decently-sized number of villages become members from the beginning to create an actual "network." For example, only having four or five villages is on too small of a scale according to Girardville's philosophy. When the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec was founded, it started out with 18 member villages in its first year.

Secondly, when adding villages to an association, Girardville stresses that one major error is putting villages in the association that shouldn't be there in the first place, so a selection committee should think carefully before accepting a village. This is an especially important point considering the fact that once a village becomes a member of the association, the process to expel it is difficult and time-consuming. Thus it is essential to consider the overall quality of a village that is being considered for admission and more specifically its capacity to attract tourists and new residents because tourists are imperative for the livelihood of many village shops, restaurants, and places of accommodation (such as hotels, B&Bs, etc.).

Finally, Girardville stresses the importance of contacting the various types of mass media, such as TV stations, newspapers and magazine journalists, etc., because more often than not they are supportive of the idea of Most Beautiful Village associations and can provide chances for an association to receive free publicity. As a real-life example of this, a TV show production company in Montreal, Quebec called "Hyperzoom" has already produced 13 30-minute segments of a culturally-oriented show based on the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages in Quebec and has sold them to a TV network. Based on initial positive viewer feedback, Hyperzoom plans to make 13 more segments in the near future. In a case like this, Quebec's association doesn't need to spend any of its funds for this type of "free" publicity because the media has essentially come to them and requested to do a cultural program regarding some of the association's member villages. The Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec has also managed to get its fair share of free publicity through newspaper articles that have been written over the years about the association, on such topics as its philosophy, reason for creation, introduction of member villages, etc.

#### **e. Impact on Population Trends and Connection to Lifestyle Entrepreneurs and Amenity Movers**

Although the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec was established less than ten years ago in 1997, it has already been having a noticeable impact on several aspects of life in member villages.

For instance, although there are no specific numbers available yet, a general increase in the number of tourists has been noticed in member villages. As Girardville points out, even if there were a large number of statistics available, it would still be quite difficult to interpret and make definitive conclusions to what those numbers mean. The spirit of the association has always been that the tourist adapts to the village and not the other way around. This important way of thinking can be considered a "take the village as is it" mentality. The association is not focused on mass tourism, but rather ecotourism, which entails visitors being careful to not damage the natural environments in the villages they travel to.

Since the association is still quite new, it is hard to say whether the population increases seen in many of the member villages is due to the positive influence of being a part of the association. It takes time

(usually at least four to five years) to get notoriety and the positive effects that come with that notoriety. However, it is clear that member villages have all built good reputations and thus housing prices are going up in these areas. Higher housing prices due to high demand for housing in member villages in turn causes property taxes (i.e. the price of ownership of a home) to go up. An unfortunate social impact of this phenomenon is that several residents no longer have the economic means to stay in their villages.

The Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec has also had an impact on the type of residents that live in each village, as well as the type of work they are engaged in. Due to the higher number of tourists visiting the member villages, many people have opened up their own B&Bs as lifestyle entrepreneurs to cater to this new demand. There have already been many cases of people, especially those who are retired or have recently retired, who have chosen to do this. In addition, many other local residents, especially those who up until now have been housewives or part-time workers, have decided to open up their own small businesses, such as cafés or arts and crafts shops, etc.

A large number of amenity movers have also been seen migrating to member villages. These amenity movers generally have a positive impact on the villages because many of them are well-educated, they know what is authentic and what is not, and they have the time and money to buy houses and make renovations with authentic materials. Other residents in the villages tend to follow the example of these amenity movers and make renovations to their own homes as well, an example of the phenomenon known as “keeping up with the Joneses.” One concrete example of this is the case of the two villages of Saint Jean Ile d’Orleans and Saint Laurent Ile d’Orleans, where almost every single house is kept in very good condition, mostly due to residents wanting to keep pace with other village residents.

So although at the beginning many villagers don’t like the fact that people from the outside are coming in and changing the “status quo,” when residents see their village becoming rejuvenated and successful in such ways as becoming a member of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec, they realize that it was a good idea after all. They also realize that changes they have worked hard to bring about have the positive effect of bringing in more tourists and thus stimulating the local economy.

## 5. Conclusions

The research concludes that Most Beautiful Village associations that have been formed throughout the world seem to share several traits in common: 1) all have the desire to preserve, renovate, and promote the exceptional natural resources and valuable heritage of their local villages on a nationwide scale (each association has strict qualification guidelines and a quality control charter in place to assure that only the best villages are accepted into their respective associations), 2) almost all have connected with local and/or national corporate sponsors, and 3) all associations are based on a global strategy that is symbolized by the creation of the Association of the World’s Most Beautiful Villages in 2003. The strategy of creating Most Beautiful Village associations has also clearly had an impact on increasing the number of lifestyle entrepreneurs and amenity movers in rural areas.

Famous French historical philosopher Baranac once said, "Leading lives devoid of tradition will be the ruin of mankind" (Sato, 1990, p.178). It is obvious that the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France was created with this saying in mind, with other countries following its lead and creating associations of their own in recent years. The strategy of creating Most Beautiful Village associations has also clearly had an impact on increasing the number of lifestyle entrepreneurs and amenity movers in rural areas.

Although there are many similar characteristics between each of the Most Beautiful Village associations, there are some interesting differences between them as well. For instance, most villages located in Most Beautiful Village associations in Europe (i.e. France, Belgium and Italy) are characterized by a circular village center surrounded by homes on the outer edges. In contrast to this, in Quebec, Canada, member villages do not have a centralized village center. Rather, the main entrance to most villages in Quebec is marked by a church and steeple. There is usually just one main road that flows through the village and that has many houses and businesses located along it, along with several side roads that contain more housing. In contrast to these two types of villages, in the case of most of the villages contained in the newly created Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan, there doesn't appear to be a centralized village center or main street leading through town. Rather, the houses and businesses in the villages are spread out over the whole area of the village with emphasis being placed on the overall beauty of each member village's scenic landscapes.

Since the population of Japan is forecast to drastically decrease by approximately 20 percent by the year 2050 according to the Population Reference Bureau, the importance of finding new ways to combat the ongoing depopulation of rural areas will become all the more critical. The recent creation of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan has been one positive step toward highlighting the many positive features of rural villages located throughout Japan. This will hopefully in turn lead to an even more heightened interest in neoruralism by the Japanese people, as it has had with the people in France and the many other countries that have created Most Beautiful Village associations.

#### Endnotes

- 1) Unless otherwise noted, facts and figures from this section are from "*Sougou Hogo Chiiki ni Okeru Nousei Keikan wo Ikasu Chiiki Zukuri Senryaku*" [*regional development strategies that utilize village landscapes in protected areas*] authored by Professor Makoto Sato of Kumamoto University.
- 2) Information obtained from the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Japan's official website online at <http://www.utsukushii-mura.jp/>.
- 3) During the Edo era (1603-1867), Japan had a total of approximately 70,000 villages. That number decreased dramatically to approximately 3,300 during the Showa era (1926-1989) and has been further lessened to approximately 1,800 in recent years due to the recent wave of consolidation of smaller villages throughout Japan. It is expected that the Japanese government will continue this consolidation trend until the number of cities and towns equals approximately 1,000.
- 4) Although the creation of the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of Quebec, along with its articles and general regulations were inspired by the Association of the Most Beautiful Villages of France, there

is currently no direct relationship between the two associations.

- 5 ) Although this might appear to be a very small amount of money, that is not the case for many of the member villages with limited budgets due to their small populations. Evidence of this is the fact that village mayors are almost all part-time workers that only received a fixed small amount of compensation from the government. The amount of compensation in and of itself is not enough to attract people to apply for the position, so all the mayors are known to be quite devoted to their jobs. In addition, most of the mayors are either retired or have other jobs.
- 6 ) It is important to note that the very beginning of Canada as a country began with the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, so that is one of the main reasons why these provinces are seen as having such rich cultural heritages and beautiful, old architectural buildings.
- 7 ) It could also be considered a winding road depending on the person, although the common interpretation is a river because each village in the association is located near a body of water, such as a river or lake.

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## 「最も美しい村連合」を介したライフスタイル起業家や アメニティムーバー育成方策

ジョシュ・ノーマン

最近日本では、財政難から田舎の町村が政府によって合併される傾向にある。この大きな合併のうねりが、小さな町村の独自性を失わせるのではと多くの人が懸念している。こうした状況下に、この10月に、農村地域の活性化をねがって、7つの町村が連携して「日本で最も美しい村連合」を組織した。しかしながら、最近日本で組織されたその連合は、その種で最初というわけではない。自国の地域社会に対する同じ心配から、1980年代以降、フランスやベルギー、イタリア、カナダなどではすでに国内組織が確立され、ドイツやオーストリアでも運動の輪が広がっている。

この論文では、ライフスタイル起業家やアメニティムーバーの育成を通し、活気のない地域社会を息づかせること、またその方策として「最も美しい村連合」の組織化が大変有効であることに焦点を当てた。そこで、フランス、ベルギー、イタリア、さらには最近組織された日本の「最も美しい連合」事業を概説すると共に、実地調査したカナダのケベック州における、「ケベックで最も美しい村連合」のフィールド調査で徹底分析している。

結論としては、世界中に組織されてきている「最も美しい村連合」には、いくつかの共通点があることがわかった。1) 田舎の村々にある、素晴らしい自然資源や貴重な文化遺産を、保護し、復元し、振興すること、2) ほとんどの連合は、地元や全国のサポーター企業と連携していること、さらに、3) すべての連合は、2003年に設立された「最も美しい村世界連合」に象徴されるグローバル戦略を有していることである。また、「最も美しい村連合」の地域活性化戦略は同時に、田園移住者やライフスタイル起業家の増大やそのあり方に大きな影響を与えているという点も指摘しておきたい。

発足したばかりの「日本で最も美しい村連合」は、全国各地の、それぞれに魅力のある農村集落の発展可能性や地域資源活用の産業化について、最初の第一歩を踏み出したと言えよう。これまでの産業開発とパラダイムを異にするが、フランス等の欧米諸国における「最も美しい村連合」加盟国の状況がそうであるように、日本人の間にも、田園居住やライフスタイル産業への期待や関心が高まることを期待したい。