

Suzuki philosophy brought to francophones Montreal office. To complement grassroots groups

MICHELLE LALONDE

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The David Suzuki Foundation has opened a Quebec office in downtown Montreal and launched a French-language website in a bid to expand the 18-year-old environmental group's influence in La Belle Province.

Suzuki, 72, is a household name across English Canada and one of the most recognized faces in the environmental movement internationally. But despite frequent visits to Quebec in recent years, the award-winning broadcaster, author and geneticist is much less known in Quebec, partly because of the language barrier.

"We simply could not be a truly national organization in Canada without having a presence in Quebec, in French," said Karel Maynard, the new francophone director of DSF Quebec.

Maynard, who is fluently bilingual, formerly headed an environmental consultant organization called Unisféra. He also co-founded Planetair, a non-profit program that advises businesses and individuals on how to offset their greenhouse gas emissions.

Maynard said the foundation has long had a healthy base of donors in West Island communities, so it makes sense to open a Montreal office to be closer and more responsive to those members. But, he said, there is also a need to bring the Suzuki philosophy of "achieving sustainability within a generation" to francophones in Quebec.

Visitors to the foundation's new French-language website will be treated to a short video clip of Suzuki inviting them, in French, to take "le Défi Nature David Suzuki" his famous challenge to individuals to take specific actions to switch to a greener lifestyle.

So far, reaction from local environmental groups has been very positive.

Sydney Ribaux, executive director of Equiterre, said the foundation is well known and well respected in Quebec's environmental community. He stressed the foundation's reputation for clearly communicating complex scientific information and added that can only complement and reinforce what groups like his are doing at a grassroots level.

"I can't deny that in certain cases groups compete for clients and funding, but if you ask me, is there room for another environmental group in Montreal? The answer is yes," he said.

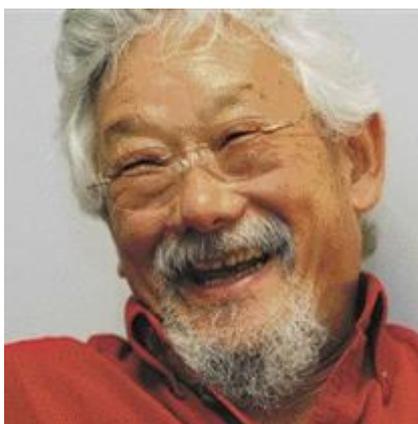
The foundation will not compete with other groups for government grants, since it does not accept money from governments, except for scientific research grants through the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. But the foundation is very effective at attracting donations from individuals and runs mainly on donations from its 40,000 members.

Ribaux said a few groups, like Greenpeace and Equiterre, do major fundraising campaigns for donations from individuals, but he said that will not cause rivalry.

"Fundraising by environmental groups is weak in Quebec compared with English Canada. ... Right now that pie is small, but the challenge is not to share a small pie, it's to make a bigger pie by making more people aware of the need to support environmental organizations," Ribaux said.

According to its mission statement, the David Suzuki Foundation "collaborates with scientists, business and industry, academia, government and non-governmental organizations ... to seek the best research to provide innovative solutions that will help build a clean, competitive economy that does not threaten the natural services that support all life."

For more information in English, go to davidsuzuki.org; for French, visit davidsuzuki.qc.ca



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David Suzuki is a household name in English Canada and his organization is reaching out to Quebecers.

mlalonde@thegazette.canwest.com

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