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New Caledonia

THE SEMITROPICAL ARCHIPELAGO of New Caledonia lies 930 miles (1,500 kilometers) east of Australia and 11,160 miles (18,000 kilometers) from Metropolitan France, of which it is an overseas possession. Just off the northeast coast of the main island, Grande Terre, lie the Loyalty Islands, raised coral atolls. Grande Terre is 248 miles (400 kilometers) long by 31 miles (50 kilometers) wide and is a piece of Gondwanaland that broke away from Australia 60–80 million years ago. This island contains great mineral wealth, including about 25 percent of the world's nickel reserves, and is the third-largest producer of nickel, which represents over 90 percent of its export revenues.

The rare plants that have managed to adapt to the soil's high mineral content are unique to New Caledonia. The archipelago therefore exhibits extremely high levels of floral and faunal (terrestrial and marine) endemism. There are 3,200 plant species, of which 79 percent are found only there, while the islands and surrounding lagoon are home to many species of bats, birds, and lizards, as well as the dugong and five species of sea turtle. New Caledonia is considered a conservation priority by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Conservation

International, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), for both its coral reef (the world's second largest) and its unique dry forests. Few fragments of the original habitat remain, however, due to uncontrolled fires; non-native cattle, pigs, and deer; urban and industrial activities; and, of course, mining, which began in 1874 and intensified greatly in the 1950s. The environmental impacts of strip-mining, which include soil erosion, sedimentation of rivers and beaches, and coral reef damage, were virtually unregulated until the 1970s. Although mineral extraction is less damaging today, abandoned mines continue to undergo serious erosion and leaching into watercourses. Meanwhile, the archipelago's sole nickel refinery is its main source of atmospheric pollution, and two more are planned.

Melanesians reached New Caledonia around 3,000 years ago (as marked by the Lapita pottery site), and a complex system of exchange relations and chieftaincies emerged, supported by traditional yam farming and fishing. Captain James Cook and his crew landed on Grande Terre in 1774 and named the archipelago. However, France took possession in 1853, and over the next century the original inhabitants, the Kanak, saw their most fertile lands seized while they themselves were forced onto reserves, to the detriment of their culture and languages.

Today, Melanesians make up the main ethnic group, at 45 percent of the total population, estimated at only 231,000 in 2004. Another 34 percent of New Caledonia's inhabitants are people of European origin, many being the descendants of former French prisoners banished to Grande Terre in the late 19th century. Other minority ethnic groups originate from the Pacific and Asia. Due almost entirely to financial transfers from Metropolitan France, New Caledonia's high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) places it among the 20 wealthiest nations in the world. However, this wealth has traditionally been concentrated in the capital, Nouméa (home to over 60 percent of the population) and is skewed toward those of European descent. French is the lingua franca, although over 20 Kanak languages are still recognized.

Grievances over colonial dispossession of Kanak land rights and their economic disadvantage have persisted. Most recently an organized Kanak pro-independence movement emerged in the 1970s,



and the 1980s saw violent uprisings against settlers and France. The Kanak leader, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, signed the Matignon Accords with the loyalist leader, Jacques Lafleur, in 1988, assenting to restitution of customary lands, promotion of Kanak culture, preparation for a future New Caledonian élite, rural development activities, and a referendum on independence after 10 years. Tjibaou was assassinated by a Kanak separatist in 1989, and the 1998 referendum did not sanction full independence. Instead, the Nouméa Accords gave further recognition of Kanak land rights and economic integration. It also provided for gradual devolution of some administrative powers to the territory, which—although remaining a part of France—became an “Overseas Country” (*Pays d’outre-mer*) in 1999. Kanak now have political majorities in two of the three provinces, and another referendum on independence is scheduled to occur between 2013 and 2018.

SEE ALSO: Biodiversity; Colonialism; Coral Reefs; Indigenous Peoples; Mining; Soil Erosion.

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New Urbanism

NEW URBANISM, A movement in architecture and planning, grew out of a belief that postwar suburban sprawl in the United States would not be able to sustain growth without adversely affecting the environment. It was a response to urban develop-

ment accompanied by environmental degradation, a declining public realm, and the rise of edge cities. The principles of new urbanism were delineated by a group of architects, planners, developers, scholars, and elected officials between 1993 and 1996 and defined by the Congress of New Urbanism (CNU) Charter, which summarizes each of the 27 new urbanist design principles. These design principles are organized into three main categories that guide development at various scales: The region (metropolis, city, and town); neighborhood, district, and corridor; and block, street, and building.

The key idea behind new urbanist design principles is to promote organized development in the form of neighborhoods that are diverse, compact, mixed use, pedestrian-friendly, and transit-oriented. The neighborhood is a crucial building block within which there are different housing types, shops, services, and civic spaces and amenities. Buildings are low- to mid-rise and high densities create a compact urban form suited to pedestrians. This helps to reduce auto dependence and promote the use of alternative forms of transportation. Civic institutions and parks occupy prominent sites. In dense urban areas, the neighborhood center is usually the commercial corridor and residential areas are arranged in semicircular patterns radiating from the center. Such patterns are often modeled on traditional U.S. villages, towns, and cities, some of which were built before World War II, including historic sections of Annapolis, Maryland, and Savannah, Georgia. The principles also emphasize that it is essential for new developments to take into consideration the local history, culture, geography, and climate of a place so as to create a distinct architectural style that is unique to the place.

Many cities and counties in the United States are beginning to incorporate new urbanist design principles not only in new suburban developments but also in urban infill developments and urban transit-oriented developments. New urbanist design principles also resonate with environmental protection, sustainable development, historic preservation, smart growth, and pedestrian and bicycle planning programs. In the field of housing, new urbanism got a major boost when Henry Cisneros, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), signed the CNU Charter in