

REPORT

Green European Foundation, with the support of Green Foundation Ireland, hosted

ECOPRO Seminar 2015

Sustainable Communities – Sustainable Jobs:
Developing the Circular Economy

Dublin City University, Dublin 9
Saturday 28 November 2015



Introduction and conclusion of event: Tommy Simpson

Facilitator of event: Stiofán Nutty

Administrator of event: Ann O'Conarain

THE KEY POINTS MADE BY OUR SPEAKERS

Martin Charter is Director of The Centre for Sustainable Design at the University College for the Creative Arts (UCCA) in Farnham, Surrey, England, and a former Visiting Professor of Sustainable Product Design at UCCA before joining full-time. Since 1988, he has worked at director level in 'business and environment' issues in consultancy, leisure, publishing, training, events and research.

Martin explained that UCCA integrates sustainability into every course they run, focusing on how resources are used efficiently, and it is a centre for sustainable design for sustainable futures. He noted that climate change is central to much discussion now, with even Pope Francis focusing on the injustices associated with climate change and Barack Obama also highlighting the effects of climate change in poorer countries. He remarked that the current status with many companies and industries is to 'take, make, dispose' rather than the circular economy ('make, use, return'). The question is how to design systems so that we can repair and reassemble, thereby cutting down on valuable finite resources. For example, Xerox uses a leasing system for their photocopiers with built in facilities for reassembly and they claim they can get up to seven lives out of some of their products. Rolls-Royce is another example of using this method with their engines.

In March 2015, France passed a law that all products must publish the lifetime of the product and ensure there are spare parts available in the future. This is the first law to address built in obsolescence – where it is often cheaper to buy a new machine than to try to fix it.

After the 2008 crash, there were major reports on green growth and green economy: Korea passed a green growth law; the Danes are also working on this. Things move slowly – are we at a point of (r)evolution or evolution? Will the change come top down or bottom up? Recently civil society is being pushed out of this discussion, yet civil society more involved now. Is there a new renaissance coming? Emergence of ICT and new technologies with the potential for sharing of knowledge may lead to the 4th Industrial Revolution!! Currently in UCCA there are 100 PhD students working on research products – laboratory discussions are very interesting with lots of potential benefits, but how do we include civil society in the sharing of ideas? By 2050, 80% of the population in Western societies will live in cities, with 60% of people in the developing world moving to cities. This gives rise to closely connected networks in cities. Opportunities will come from this change and we need to look at how we can design systems to share information on sustainable development.

Crowd-sourcing and crowd-funding ideas, together with Hackathon's Open Source, Fixperts, Fab Labs and Imaginariums, are now more relevant for working towards sustainable development.

There are 18 Repair Cafés in the UK, with many due to open in Ireland also.

Ichin Cheng is Director and Co-Founder of Sustainable Innovation Lab in the UK and has many years' international environmental, climate change and sustainability related experience. She is an unique sustainable specialist with special knowledge of the Greater China area and a deep understanding of EU standards. She has worked on many projects in the EU, Asia and the US.

Ichin's work covers climate change policy, water, sustainable consumption and production, strategic business development, green public procurement, eco-city, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

The key points in Ichin's presentation were:

Europe 2020 Strategy – knowledge and sustainable growth.

Issues at stake and challenges include environmental pressure, resource scarcity in Europe, re-industrialisation of Europe, and urbanisation.

EC 2020 Strategy – Work with Nike to recycle and new research about material.

Need for companies now to be "clean" – in Japan, Sekisui Chemical Company is reusing system for house-building; in the UK, Bio Bean Start Up recycles waste coffee grounds to create advanced bio fuels; in Taiwan, the city of Taipei has turned an old repair street to a new craft and creative street, which is now a tourist attraction as an urban regeneration project.

With so many ideas and a big EU policy on sustainability, how do we move forward?

John Barry is Professor of Green Political Economy at the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy in Queen's University Belfast. He has a BA and MA from University College Dublin and a PhD from the University of Glasgow. His areas of research include green political economy and green economics; economic practices and sustainability, normative aspects of sustainable development; governance for sustainable development; the greening of citizenship and civic republicanism; green politics in Ireland, North and South; the Transition Movement; the politics, ethics and economics of peak oil and climate change; the governance of science and innovation; the link between academic knowledge, political activism and policy making; trust, legitimacy and public policy; citizenship, public policy and governance; post-conflict politics and political economy in Northern Ireland and theories and practices of reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

John is a founding member of two think tanks, the Centre for Progressive Economics and Greenhouse, and is also a founding member of Holywood Transition Town and the 'Holywood Buy Local' campaign. He is a keen cyclist, indifferent cook, frequently absent from his family and a passionate believer in the ability of people to initiate social transformation.

John's main points included:

"Any damn fool can make something complex, how do we simplify things?" Meitheal, communities coming together – role for communication technology.

Increasing electrification of our lives – Greening of the economy can be narrowly focused on internet of things – 1 trillion sensors linking digital and technological world.

Regulation can drive innovation – 7th EU Environmental Action Plan is a long-term vision of sustainability.

Current research – "economic growth is mythic".

All are involved in economic growth addiction – our notion of the good life – just 'liking' a climate change petition changes nothing and higher rates of recycling do not always translate into Green living!

Consumerism is like a cancer! We have reached a threshold where forms of life on the planet are being extinguished and inequality among humans is flourishing.

We need to move away from the three Bs (Buildings, Banks and Boutiques) to the three Ls (Libraries, Laundromats and Light Rail). There is also a need to share products we use every day – for example, power drills, lawn mowers, etc. According to the Sesame Street cartoon, 99% of the cookies are eaten by 1% of the monsters, and so it is with the world's resources – this must change.

Don't add to GDP but add to well-being and people flourishing. Move away from our fixation on GDP to a post-growth society – prepare for a world very different from the one we know now – in some way it is possibly the end of the world as we know it!

Bernie Walsh is the Manager of **Sunflower Recycling**, which was established to create employment in Dublin's inner city in 1995 and employs 32 long-term unemployed via the Community Employment programme and 6 through the full-time Job Initiative Scheme. Sunflower Recycling was successful in obtaining EU funding through both the INTEGRA and YOUTHSTART programmes in its early years, and was chosen as the representative project from Ireland for the conference in Barcelona.

Sunflower Recycling has a long-reaching reputation for the work it does and has also gained recognition for recycling as an option for future job creation.

Bernie's key points included:

More supports in previous than now. Funding has been cut and the government does not appear to see the benefit of community organisations – everything now has to be economically viable.

Sunflower Recycling is involved in many recycling projects including furniture, clothes and mattress recycling. They have created a sustainable social economy enterprise in mattress recycling, saving the environmental waste which would otherwise accumulate from dumping mattresses.

Sandy Dunlop is a Director of Green Foundation Ireland and a Member of the Climate Gathering Team. Both of these initiatives address the current problems with the Green narrative – the dystopian imagery and the vastness of the issues tend to turn people away! How can we get engagement through challenging the "myths we live by" and so inspire new types of cultural action and culturally inspiring figures?

Sandy recently became part of the team heading up the Terenure College Rugby Football Club 2020 Project, working in re-imagining club rugby in the post-professional era. The project has inspired voluntarism (10,000 volunteer hours pledged each year!) and an initiative like the Under 13s European Tournament that will bring 24 teams to Terenure in 2016. The Project is now focussing on building a Global Diaspora and "Turning on the Lights" – a major fund-raising initiative.

The main points in Sandy's presentation included:

The Green movement scares people but doesn't recruit them! Sandy is part of the Terenure rugby club transformation which is now a highly successful club with state of the art facilities.

He noted that the collective know what is needed – however 1% of the population tend to own 99% of the resources.

Sandy is also responsible for facilitating the Terenure 2030 Initiative which brought volunteers in the community together through a seeding event to improve Terenure and to look at energy saving initiatives through retrofitting and other measures – these could then be replicated in other communities. Research has been carried out and methods of moving forward have been developed – however, funding of the scheme remains an issue to be resolved before the project can begin.

Eileen McDermott
Director, Green Foundation Ireland

9 December 2015

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