

REPORT

**Green European Foundation, with the support of
Green Foundation Ireland and the
Green House Think Tank, invite you to a
hybrid conference (in-person and online):**

RETHINKING DEMAND: Reality and Opportunity



Wednesday 26 October 2022 – 14:00 to 17:30

Venue – for those who wish to attend in person:

Oak Room, The Mansion House, Dawson Street, Dublin 2

By Zoom – for those who wish to attend online:

Log-on details will be issued nearer the time to those who register

Rethinking Demand: Reality and Opportunity

BACKGROUND

Green European Foundation, with the support of **Green Foundation Ireland** and **Green House Think Tank**, organised a hybrid conference '**Rethinking Demand: Reality and Opportunity**' in the Oak Room of Dublin's Mansion House on 26 October 2022. At this event, a paper [*Rethinking Energy Demand*](#), which was published by Green House Think Tank in the UK and written by Peter Sims, Nadine Storey and Jonathan Essex, was launched and discussed.

Sien Hasker provided the guidance and support on behalf of Green European Foundation.

Tommy Simpson was Green Foundation Ireland's Co-Ordinator for this project, **Davie Philip** of Cultivate was the Facilitator, and **Ann O'Conarain** was the Administrator. The event was organised and recorded by **John Gormley**.

CONFERENCE

Darcy Lonergan, the Deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin, welcomed all participants to the Mansion House including those who were participating by Zoom. She was followed by **Nuala Ahern**, former Chair of the Green Foundation Ireland (GFI), who thanked the organisers and sponsors of the event.

Davie Philip explained to the audience of around 50 people in-person and 70 online how the day would proceed. He assured the audience that, not only would they get to hear the expert speakers, but there would be adequate opportunity to participate and ask questions.

He then invited **Sien Hasker** to speak from Brussels. Sien outlined the work of Green European Foundation (GEF) and how they had worked previously with Green House Think Tank and with GFI. She regretted that she could not be there in person and wished all the participants a successful day.

Davie then asked **Jonathan Essex** and **Peter Sims** of Green House Think Tank to present their paper which was available to audience members in hard copy.

Jonathan and Peter gave a PowerPoint presentation on the big screen in the Oak Room of the Mansion House.

They described the project methodology and how the focus was on direct energy demand not wider resource use. They had conducted Interviews with over 30 academics, thought leaders and green politicians between June and September 2022, as well as two round table discussions.

The key question they wanted to answer was: **what do we mean by rethinking energy demand?**

Their stated aim was to change the demand for energy services, not just how they are provided.

Societies now needed to make key choices, which could be summed up as follows:

- Carbon overshoot or reduce demand?
- Status quo or disruption?
- Redistribution or locked-in unfairness?

Because of this new emergency, it was now time for a new system of governance which would look at new post growth objectives, ensure fairness and a bottom up approach.

They then went on to suggest a package of policies that would combine sticks and carrots, including sector level and economy-wide programmes for a 'just transition' of supply.

They concluded their presentation by talking about the importance of narratives. Only by changing the prevailing narrative can we change culture. The 'why' matters not just the 'what'.

We need to trust people with reality and complexity. We need to overcome the view that "other people will do this as it will make us unpopular and does not win you votes". The whole message is needed – not barriers in our mindset or being too scared to say the right thing.

There was then a number of responses to the paper.

Sadhbh O'Neill from the Centre of Climate and Society in Dublin City University highlighted the need to focus on degrowth. She expressed disappointment that so few politicians in Dáil Éireann (the Irish Parliament) have ever spoken about the need for degrowth. She asked how can we repackage this essential concept to make it less daunting for the public.

Orla Kelly, Assistant Professor at the Department of Social work and Social Justice in University College Dublin, welcomed the report. She said the time for incremental change is past. It is about structural change which is far more important than individual change. We are in this situation because corporate interests have stalled any changes. She cited the newspaper, the *Irish Farmers Journal*, as one example of this. Environmental needs and social needs are not oppositional. The narrative needs to change.

At this point Davie took questions and points from the audience, both from those in-person and online. Those who spoke did so from the podium. Peter and Jonathan then reasoned to the points raised.

After a short networking break, **Michael Smith** of Village Magazine took over as chair of the session.

He introduced **John Gibbons**, the environmental journalist and campaigner. John stated that he spent most of his time speaking to the unconverted unlike those at this seminar. As a communicator, he tries to simplify the message. We have exceeded 6 of the 9 planetary boundaries – which is the equivalent of multiple organ failure. The big question not answered in the report is how do we 'bell the climate cat'.

Claire Downey from the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun spoke about how recycling and the circular economy can play an important role in reducing our carbon footprint. She illustrated her point by talking about the mobile phone components that can be recycled. The main point is how do we engage with citizens.

Davie Philip from Cultivate indicated that a community-led approach to regional resilience is needed because it is clear we are going to have to live with the immediate problems of climate change. In particular he focused on co-operatives.

Rosalind Skillen, an environmentalist and columnist with the *Belfast Telegraph*, talked about shaping the narrative away from green austerity to real opportunity and a better quality of life. We have a choice about dealing with the vested interests embedded in our political system.

All of the speakers then addressed questions from the audience and those online.

The gathering was addressed by **Minister Ossian Smyth**, who has overall responsibility for the circular economy in the Irish government. He told us that moving towards a new model of the economy was a 'cultural challenge'. He said gradually things are changing. GDP and consuming more are not good measurements of quality of life and sustainability. In fact, measuring our prosperity by how fast we consume finite resources is a 'stupid idea'.

More questions and points were taken from the audience and **Sadhbh O'Neill** summed up the main points of the afternoon.

Finally, the conference organiser **John Gormley** thanked everybody, particularly GEF, for their participation and support. He told everyone that he had addressed the first COP in Berlin in 1995 as Lord Mayor of Dublin and had also attended the 2009 COP in Copenhagen as Minister for the Environment. He said degrowth represented the only viable path to a solution.

You can [access our videos of the conference here](#).

Green Foundation Ireland

25 November 2022