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CRC Reflections: Past Five Years and Future Forward

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Moderated by Professor Ann Dale

Participants

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Dialogue

Ann Dale

Welcome to our brainstorming session on lessons learned from the first five years of my Canada Research Chair program and our plans for the next five years. First, I would like to congratulate Lenore Newman on her Canada Research Chair, perhaps you could explain a little about what you are going to be doing?

Lenore Newman

I am taking up a Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Environment at University of the Fraser Valley. I will be looking at Canada's food systems and culinary traditions and discussing how they are linked to both the environment and to the diversity of cultures in our country. We will be building a database of Canadian foods,

and discussing what threatens their survival in a changing world. This work is geographical in nature and builds on the skills I have developed working with Ann.

The work will involve extensive use of digital media, and I just received notice that the funding for the associated media lab was approved. Looking back at the first five years of the research one thing that strikes me is how spatial studies emerged as a key strand of research. Spatial justice emerged several times as we explored sustainable development.

Rebecca Foon

Congratulations Lenore. Very exciting work!

Yuill Herbert

This sounds fascinating Lenore... When you say a database of Canadian foods, does this include ethnic foods or is it focused on traditional indigenous foods?

Lenore Newman

Yuill, I will be arguing that Canadian cuisine is defined by inclusion of wild foods (more so than any other nation), immigrant cuisines, and local ingredients. I will also argue that First Nations cuisine contributes to this. For example, the Salmon Roll out here on the West Coast is iconic Canadiana-Japan meets First Nations!

Robert Newell

This sounds great, Lenore! I'm curious as to what sort of plans you have with the digital media work if you don't mind expanding on that.

Lenore Newman

As for the digital media we will be taking photos, and making short films about food, showing the whole chain from field to table. I will be continuing my focus on chefs as well.

Ann Dale

It has been a long and very fruitful collaboration, Lenore. Can you explain what you mean by spatial justice?

Lenore Newman

Sure, Ann. This is the idea that people have the right to space, be it green and healthy urban spaces or spaces free of environmental degradation. I think that our paper "Sustainable Development for Some" was one of our more popular as it really stressed that social sustainability matters. We can't just have sustainable spaces for the rich!

Ann Dale

In addition to the importance of spatial justice, we also began to be concerned with the shrinking of the public sphere, or public space, the privatization of the public. Our recent article comparing the developments of Granville Island, the Forks in Winnipeg and the proposed redevelopment of Lansdowne Park in Ottawa looks at this question. It relates to how certain places and the amenities they offer may be more of an attractor to the creative class; however, once these spaces are lost to 'development', they are gone forever.

I have just returned from Paris, and an international social science forum on global environmental change, and many believed a key research question was "what is progress in modern tightly coupled socio-ecological systems?"

Yuill Herbert

What role do you think spaces dominated by advertising (such as Yonge and Bloor) play in the question of spatial justice? Is it correct that people should be able to dominate a space in order to impose a message of consumption?

Ann Dale

Interesting question. I am less concerned about advertising billboards (disregarding aesthetics) and more concerned about spatial justice in large urban centres, when wealthy enclaves sit side by side next to marginalized communities.

Rebecca Foon

Interesting. Billboards do bring up the question of aesthetics and beauty and perhaps the debate around public versus private space. But yes, I also am interested in how we can encourage diverse, healthy communities, where schools offer a mix of programs for a diverse group of kids. The idea here is communities free of enclaves and fostering community building.

Chris Ling

Gated communities is an interesting one. I (like many) immediately think of enclaves of the rich, but, at the Spaces and Flows conference in LA last year, we were introduced to examples of gated communities that were anything but, and actually were enclaves of social disorder and crime. This still speaks to spatial justice, but makes a gated community a more nuanced indicator than you may be imagining.

Yuill Herbert

But I think its more than aesthetics or maybe aesthetics is more than aesthetics in that surrounding have a deeply formative impact on a culture (I think of the dramatic west coast versus the mild and hardy mountainless east coast). In the same way, are not billboards imposing an ideology on space, isolating people through artificial glamour and wealth just like the broken glass topped wall of Forrest Hills (if I have the neighbourhood correct)?

Chris Ling

That is exactly how I see it. The human soul/spirit however you want to name it is intrinsically linked to and affected by the physical appearance of the environment. In our personal environments clutter and mess lead to personal inertia. I believe the same very much occurs at largely scales; i.e., dehumanizing brutal architecture has been seen to fail socially precisely because of its appearance.

Rebecca Foon

And, perhaps the lack of aesthetics creates a sense of numbness because the space is devoid of beauty; therefore, limiting creativity and not valuing the natural environment.

I think notion of values is critical. When we don't value aesthetics, social and ecological justice, the natural environment, we loose ourselves and are inspired to create mega strip malls.

Chris Ling

I am not sure anyone is ever 'inspired' to create strip malls. I think they are in fact an inevitable response to unimaginative mono-functional zoning and planning. If a property owner is:

- a) prevented from building mixed use development;
- b) gets no credit for incorporating ecological or aesthetic functionality;
- c) is obliged to provide a certain number of parking units, and
- d)and has no understanding or respect for what went before.

...then what is left to build?

Yuill Herbert

Strip malls are also a very efficient way to provide people access to goods. They are long and narrow maximizing the number of cars that can park out front. They have shared walls and reduce the construction costs and heating requirements. They are boxes with optimal surface to volume ratios given easily available construction materials. To me strip malls are all about efficiency and speed. But, it is an efficiency and speed that neglects beauty, happiness and human scale activity!

Chris Ling

And, also an efficiency and speed that is only looking within the boundaries of the mall itself and not of the efficiency of the urban system as a whole which is actually made slower and less efficient that strip malls. It is one manifestation of the scale aspects of the CRC Chair.

Ann Dale

Chris, it is imperative that the rules of the game change. So many OCPS and now ICSPs and many communities are not integrating them, never mind implementing them. Such an implementation gap.

We are in the middle of preparing a final report from the strategic sustainable cities reviews, pulling policy recommendations from six international case studies and three e-dialogues with 19 municipal planners across the country. We hope to publish in September and distribute widely to Canadian municipal decision-makers and politicians.

Chris Ling

I don't know if you found this in the dialogues, but there is huge awareness that the rules need to change in the professions that deal with them. But many communities can't afford or don't see the need to employ these professionals. Those communities are also not necessarily empowered to change the rules even if they see the need. High order governments that do have the control I suspect don't see this as a priority.

Ann Dale

In the interim, however, municipal decision-makers could make sure their current 'rules' are aligned. By this I mean that the rules are not inconsistent, redundancy and overlap is reduced, and the rules are simplified to try and create 'space' for more innovation. And, then policy coherence between levels of government would be ideal.

Lenore Newman

Given our interest in systems and self-organization I think simplicity will continue to emerge as a key concept. Streamlined planning and allowing multiple use and innovation...

Robert Newell

I seemed to remember watching a documentary entitled "A Convenient Truth" which involved changes the municipal government made in Curitiba, Brazil, that were done on limited resources but ultimately did help the city greatly on a social and economic level. Even on a much smaller scale, I remember implementing a few co-op programs in small

Kootenay towns that actually cost basically nothing but did end in food and product distribution and less waste. I actually think sustainable development programs can be done with little resources but there seems to be a large fear of people trying "something new".

Ann Dale

Rob, I totally agree, and that is another lesson we have learned from the first five years: the need to link the sustainable development literature to the social innovation literature. There is so much happening on the ground in many communities; how to speed the exploitation of learning? Perhaps, through our social media experiments?

Robert Newell

Absolutely. Social media very much has the potential to connect and energize groups. Many hands make light work.

Yuill Herbert

It is interesting to see how so much focus by governments and society in general has on technical innovation: iPhones to Priuses, pv panels to LED lights. But, there has been little focus on social innovation such as new ways of organizing, new forms of incentives, new forms of co-operation. In addition, round tables, co-operatives, community land trusts, revolving loan funds all seem to fit in this category to me.

Ann Dale

Ah, Mr. Yuill Herbert, the value of social processes and social capital for social innovation. It is far easier to create new things, than to look into our own souls and change our own behaviour. Again, a key question, what is progress in the 21st century?

Chris Ling

I wonder if to what extent this is journalists liking shiny new toys to write about alongside

enticing techno-porn images. Community activists are perhaps not so visually enticing. Present company excluded, of course.

Robert Newell

The interesting thing about the above comments is that I attended a Community Economic Development conference earlier this year, and a point was made that often the non-profit sector was looked to for social innovation. I had a brainstorming session with a few of the others on this point, and we came up with the fact that because non-profits are so resource limited, we (non-profit folks) actually need to come up with methods of achieving a project goal without relying on a solid stream of funds. From several years of working in non-profit, I entirely agree with this. The projects are based on community engagement and partnership and a major (not the only, though) reason for this is limited funding a resources. So, it seems that resource stress really brings a community together. It happens with other animals, so why not people?

Rebecca Foon

Interesting. When I was interviewing the City of Portland for our case studies, many city officials discussed how community building needs to be the foundation of any sustainable initiative implemented by the city. And, they are trying to pool resources from all direction and truly integrate solutions and strategies to get initiatives off the ground. Their green infrastructure initiatives are moving forward very quickly and thousands of residents are participating in the design and maintenance of the city's green streets, etc.

Yuill Herbert

We have been thinking a lot about ICPS and their impact. It was very interesting in Nova Scotia because the NS Government required each municipality to complete an ICSP. Most elected to hire a consultant for a cost of between \$40,000 to \$80,000. Half a dozen municipalities elected to hire staff. These municipalities have now integrated sustainability into their operations.

I was talking to a coordinator from a small community called Bridgewater. They just did \$300,000 worth of energy retrofits, installed one of the largest solar hotwater systems in Nova Scotia on their town hall, and they have an annual sustainability festival and are trying to integrate sustainability into their new official plan.

The real question was where to put the resources!

Ann Dale

I encourage people to go the case studies section of our website and look at the studies of Malmo and Vaxjo, it can be done. Interesting that the communities who actually seemed to do something used the money to create capacity?

You know, Chris, this conversation takes me back to Paris. Such an architecturally rich city, and yet a colleague told me that more than 15,000 people (mainly elderly) died in the heat wave a few years ago. Perhaps, as we have discussed as a team, it is fundamentally about a reconciliation between the built and the non-built environment, one also has to celebrate the mundane and the profane. Nature is not out there; it could be everywhere if we deliberately designed our cities to be more diverse in its built form, recognizing that built aesthetics are linked to natural aesthetics. And, if there is no space for people to meet and talk, social capital decreases?

I have long argued that the social imperative is the least understood of the three imperatives model we have been working from, and indeed, in leaner economic times or even in green developments, it is often the one imperative that is cut back? I think aesthetics may become increasingly more important in the future. Indeed if we had understood the aesthetics of the environment more, we would not have sacrificed so much of the non-built environment for the built environment. Any comments, guys?

Robert Newell

Humans are a very reactionary species, and it definitely did take a massive sacrifice of the non-built environment to understand that a sacrifice was being made. Very true that the effects are nowhere near completely understood and theories about psychological impacts of being separated from the natural are still coming about and currently in-development.

Chris Ling

One of the things we finished looking at in our research was the link between the landscape and community success. We started by looking the creativity agenda, but I think I at least am persuaded that the vitality concept is much more fruitful and relevant. I think this also links strongly to spatial justice: ecological and aesthetic quality being largely sacrificed in the name of economic development and jobs where communities are not empowered to protect them. This is the case despite growing evidence that ecological and aesthetic quality can in fact stimulate more sustainable development in the longer term.

Yuill Herbert

A big challenge for many particularly rural communities is that they want more economic development and more jobs and are willing (or don't fully understand) the implications of sacrificing ecological and aesthetic qualities. The example of a Walmart coming to town is a perfect example of this. Seems that better off members of the community oppose it and those who want cheaper goods and need jobs are in favour. But, the overall consequences are that it wipes out businesses that deliver more value to the business community and perpetuates sprawl. It is really challenging to figure out a meaningful way to promote this concept. I have been watching this battle play out in Salmon Arm, BC and a strong voice against the Walmart is the Shuswap First Nations Band. They are not for whatever reason swayed by the same notions of progress, and, optimistically, I put it down to a different worldview.

Ann Dale

Indeed if we had understood the aesthetics of the environment more, we would not have sacrificed so much of the non-built environment for the built environment.

Chris Ling

This implies that the built environment can't be beautiful, which it certainly can be (well designed architecture can enhance the landscape in which it is situated). Unfortunately, this is all too rare in reality, especially in post 1950s mass produced residential suburbs and car orientated retail development. Coming over the hill and seeing Salisbury Plain is very underwhelming unless that hill is the one that makes Stonehenge suddenly visible (ugly roads and visitor centres notwithstanding).

One quote from our interviews in the sustainable infrastructure that I always remember was (more or less): "people wanted us to incorporate more social/affordable housing but no one wants to pay for it. We are a private enterprise and we are not in a position to subsidize. Also, the municipality wants it but is not prepared to provide any subsidy for it...."

Given that this came from people involved with Dockside Green and that development has essentially gone bankrupt (perhaps lending credence to the assertion the private sector couldn't afford to subsidize more than they did), how does society find the capital to invest in social housing and allow access to affordable sustainability?

Lenore Newman

Chris, I think that is a question we will all be asking going forward. Given that maximum tax rates in the US have fallen from 90% in the 50s to 35%, now it is likely we will continue to see incredible inequity in our societies, and environment will become a luxury good. In short, I don't know how we can fund these things without re-thinking our economics.

Ann Dale

Yuill, Rebecca, and Rob, any responses to these issues? If we had integrated decision-making that reconciled the ecological, the social, and the economic, then perhaps the social would not always be compromised? But, we don't seem to be very proficient at such decisions.

Robert Newell

I can speak directly to the Dockside Green phenomenon because I've taken groups of people on tours through there to show the sort of things Victoria is coming up with. The thing is that even though the area is technically functioning as dwellings and neighbourhood, it really seems to be primarily operating as an example of how neighbourhoods can be green. And, it is not really affordable to the general public. But, I do very much like it as a model.

Chris Ling

I certainly didn't mean to criticize the development. It is however a new thing, and, like all new things, lessons need to be heeded and understood

Robert Newell

Of course. Dockside Green is still quite a new concept for a neighbourhood and well ahead of its time. The pricing is definitely an issue but the neighbourhood is doing some really neat green things. I do hope that larger areas adopt the Dockside Green model because a widespread adoption would probably lead to affordability. But, yes...definitely ahead of its time and sometime is needed before it can become a norm.

What I've become quite interested in is the community garden developments that have shown up in the rough areas of Detroit. Since grocery stores simply can not do viable business in these areas, then the community was pushed into creating these garden patches to sustain the local neighbourhoods. I've personally seen the same in South African townships, and this sort of thing does bring in my interest because it shows an economical way of creating a greener area while bringing people together.

Rebecca Foon

Interesting. I have also seen these in the townships as well as here in Montreal.

The city gives funding to promote community gardens: eighteen boroughs now offer plots of land to residents for community gardening. They also provide technical assistance via gardening instructors who visit the garden regularly to give advice to gardeners. It has been very successful to help encourage local food growing in the city.

Chris Ling

I think it is going to be very interesting to see if something similar starts to happen in the ghost estates around Dublin in Ireland.

Yuill Herbert

Apparently Detroit is turning its abandoned neighbourhoods into new forests and urban homesteads. Check out this article: <http://www.onearth.org/article/motown-revival>

Lenore Newman

This discussion makes me think about how Ann and I had some very rich discussion over the years based on our difference: I'm an urban critter who sees the city as an extension of the natural world and Ann likes the solitude of nature. Over the years this diversity led to some wonderful things, such as the mundane nature piece we wrote for Alternatives.

Yuill Herbert

I agree difference and diversity is critical to a meaningful discussion. But, probably any two people can find difference if they dig deep enough. I think this is exactly why the round table concept is so powerful. It makes humans face each other as equals and express their differences from one human to the other in a protected space. The model of the LRMPs, CORE, watershed round tables seems to have fallen out of fashion but I think is very powerful.

Robert Newell

That is a neat point, Lenore, regarding the difference between you and Ann. I often brought the urban/natural dichotomy in discussion sessions with my conservation volunteers when working in projects overseas. I would ask my volunteers what they considered to be "unnatural", and it was basically anything touched by people. In turn, the words "natural" and "unnatural" have actually basically separated humans from the rest of the world. On a fundamental, linguistic understanding, if we continue to classify what is natural or not by using humanity as the indicator, we might not be able to create a town that is in harmony with its environment (really it should be "of" the environment rather than "in harmony with").

Ann Dale

Rob, I am going to throw you a curve ball, is there any way social media can help to make this key connection you point out?

Robert Newell

I would definitely say "yes" on this one. Even with our use of pop media sources such as YouTube, the stop motion that we made and the upcoming films are very much focused on a co-development between "natural" aspects and human aspects. From a visual aspect, this co-development simply looks like a singular development of one environment; i.e., human and forest inseparable. Or, at least, this is the visual goal. A concept like this is definitely best explained with a feeling that humans are included in nature rather than a deductive explanation.

Ann Dale

Remember our 'debates' on limits and the resulting paper on scale, why human beings never achieve optimal scale and our systems is based on maximal scale?

Lenore Newman

Scale emerged strongly in the work we all did and will remain important. With respect to my food work I have come to understand that local isn't always best and that global isn't always bad. I think our spatial work has shown that diversity of scale is critical to success. The problem remains that neoliberal capitalism is based on bigger, bigger, bigger all of the time.

Chris Ling

I wonder if part of the attraction of solitude and nature is a reaction to how badly our cities are designed for people and nature?

Ann Dale

Chris, brilliant, I could not agree more, although Paris is so very different from other cities, the lack of green space was surprising to me? And, yet the built environment is majestic. And, Lenore, there was very little mundane nature in Paris.

Chris Ling

The reason Paris is different is because the public sphere controls very tightly the development of buildings within the City. There are strict rules as to what can and can't be built, how tall it can be, and how it looks. Of course, the darkside of this is that it could only have happened given the dictatorial and authoritarian regime that tore down what went before, displaced communities, and built long straight boulevards so armies could march quickly in to the city and quell trouble.

Ann Dale

Rebecca, maybe the mega strip malls are North America's version of the Parisian boulevards. I do think, however, that a key lesson for all of us is the importance of diversity. I think even mega malls could be made more 'beautiful' with more integrated design.

Chris Ling

Of course strip malls could use integrated design, but they still need to be surrounded by car parking which is one of the ugliest forms of development possible. This limits their ability to be integrated into the urban fabric.

Rebecca Foon

I believe the integrated design process can help beautify or avoid mundane, depressing architecture. Perhaps, we could begin to open up the integrated design process to allow more creative voices into the mix even integrating commissioned artists committed to making public art, or community curators interested in art programming and architecture. It does seem that in Europe and even in cities like Cape Town (coming back to South Africa) that space is considered or valued as multi-functional, and music/art is encouraged in diverse unique spaces stimulating the cultural context.

Ann Dale

Another point, why is art kept indoors in museums(long line ups in Paris by the way)? Why isn't it everywhere? Copies on the sides of buildings, in malls, part of the public space. Rebecca, any thoughts on how to bring the arts and music more into communities? I heard a public concert in a church in Monnieux that was over 800 years old. Made the church come alive.

Chris Ling

In my opinion, one of the things that makes Vancouver and Amsterdam airports a little more bearable than most is the presence of quality art within them. Schipol in Amsterdam for instance has outposts of the art museums in the City.

Ann Dale

Chris, can you explain your work on multi-functionality?

Chris Ling

It is the idea that any landscape has multiple functions and that neglecting to consider all of these functions devalues the landscape and reduces its potential. For the sake of argument these functions have been variously categorized but I prefer the meta-functional groups of ecological, social, economic, historical/cultural, and aesthetic.

My research suggests that landscapes have all these functions in some form or another.

Lenore Newman

Chris and I are hoping to do some work on market spaces using cameras and mapping to reveal multiple function patterns. Hopefully, this will happen next granting cycle as we came close but not quite on this. Markets in particular have revealed a wealth of uses.

Ann Dale

What is the meaning of the riots last night in Vancouver, any ideas?

Lenore Newman

Odd you mention the riots, Ann. My blog post on them is rapidly becoming my most viewed post. It's up at <http://sandandfeathers.wordpress.com/2011/06/16/did-the-state-turn-a-blind-eye-to-last-nights-hockey-violence/> and feel free to repost on facebook, etc.

Chris Ling

I think Lenore captured it extremely well in her latest blog post. Personally, I couldn't

help but think even sports related violence is more laid back in Vancouver than in the UK. I agree with Lenore though anyone who thought this wouldn't happen was deluded.

Yuill Herbert

Wow, an interesting reflection Lenore. It didn't occur to me at all that the riots might be a reflection of a broader social malaise.

Ann Dale

When I was watching the riots last night, I thought "what is progress?" What are the underlying drivers for such violence around sports? And, then on George Stroumboulopoulos, he interviewed Koss, a former Olympian speed skater who founded, The Right to Play, which is a group that brings sports to children in the developing world. In Pakistan, girls were originally not allowed to play soccer, and a wall had to be built to protect them, there are now 12,000 young girls playing soccer in that country. To me, this is a shining example of integrated thinking and innovation.

So, we learned that sustainable community development is about reconciliation at multiple levels and scales, and sustainable community development is of the built and the non-built environment, of place, with limits, related to scale, and particularly related to diversity. And, changing the rules of the game is critical to any meaningful realization of sustainable community development. We didn't explore in greater depth the relationship between diversity and multi-functionality, which is perhaps another research question. Three of the things I am proud of is the integrated community sustainability tool we developed(that ironically seems to have more take-up in Europe than by our Canadian colleagues), the latest series of e-Dialogues on sustainable cities led by Rebecca Foon, and the on-line case studies we have published.

Let's talk about the next five years. One thought I have is that sustainable development may be too much about adaptation and that we human beings have to be much more proactive, for example, climate change should be as focused on mitigation as it is on adaptation. Makes me think of the movie, Clockwork Orange, for some reason, maybe overly influenced by the violence of last night? So, we came up with the concept of community vitality? Rebecca, do you want to share some of our thinking about its meaning, perhaps followed by Yuill Herbert on the five proxy indicators we have been working on? Would be interested in everyone's ideas on what we have been thinking about?

Rebecca Foon

We are currently developing a site to be launched in the fall 2011, that is a thematic investigation of the factors we think are important to community vitality. We have been trying to gain a holistic understanding of community vitality, examining the difference between a thriving community and a community that is merely surviving. We have been asking ourselves and each other what are the key factors that contribute to a thriving community? As we continue to be confronted by the impacts of climate change, it is so important to understand why some communities are resilient, adaptive and innovative in the face of change or disaster while others are not.

We have been scanning the existing, cutting-edge literature on the subject and have identified proxy indicators we feel as a team have the greatest impact on the vitality of a community.

We have also drafted a series of 12 papers that examines key factors related to community vitality. These papers will be available on the community vitality website (to be launched this fall). Yuill, do you want to discuss the proxy indicators?

Yuill Herbert

The factors which we have identified as indicators of community vitality are:

- diversity;
- accessibility;
- dead space;
- community capitals;
- vital space, and
- connectivity.

One interesting thing we have done is that instead of trying to define these using words, we are trying to use pictures. So for example here is the photo album on dead space: <https://picasaweb.google.com/118352398136743480958/DeadSpace?feat=directlink>

Rebecca Foon

This is also inspired by pechakucha presentations (<http://www.pecha-kucha.org>). The meaning of place, vital or dead space, community capitals, etc. is different for everyone and we decided that through visuals we can stimulate people both viscerally and intellectually to encourage discussion around community vitality.

Chris Ling

Ironically, the least “dead” I would argue is the literal dead space (reference the graveyard) you have identified, which is beautiful and rich with ecological, aesthetic, social and historical functionality. But, I would be surprised if this had not been picked up by you already.

Ann Dale

And we have tried to be deliberately provocative with some of the pictures. Boy, did the three of us have lively debate about what to include or not (one of us has seemed to have a darker view of life). As educators, if we even get people to think about what is vital or not about their communities, we will have succeeded somewhat. This goes back to the survey we did for the first five years, looking at the relationships between sustainable development, agency and social capital. Many respondents commented that it made them think about their community.

Yuill Herbert

Yeah, unfortunately all my photos of road kill were excluded. I had almost every species represented in various forms of destruction. Also, all the crosses by the road were voted out. So it goes!

Ann Dale

Lenore and Chris, any comments on the proxy indicators we have identified?

Chris Ling

Not to devalue your indicators project at all, but I actually think our cultural obsession with measuring progress/growth is part of the problem. Measuring anything is essentially reductionist, and inevitably means making choices about what to measure. Therefore, this means we don't measure other things which may be equally, if not more important, but are very difficult to measure. This is the root of GDP running our world and results in bad decision making. As Bobby Kennedy said "it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And, it tells us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans."

Those things that make life worthwhile are, however, almost impossible to objectively measure and yet we persist in basing all out policy on what can be measured.

Yuill Herbert

Agreed. None of the great things like beauty, love, harmony (as in music, not peace and love), poetry, art can be measured (what are the other great things?) unless you are a very, very good mathematician. So, we don't bother and measure all the non-great things (simple) and determine our progress by the how much of these we can accumulate.

Ann Dale

And, community sustainable development, of course.

Rob, can you explain a little about the next phase of our research program, talk a little about HEADTalks, and maybe give people the address?

Robert Newell

HEAD Talks is a cute acronym for Humanity, Education, and Design Talks and it serves as a channel for ideas concerning sustainable community development and community vitality. Many will recognize the phonetic similarity between HEAD Talks and TED Talks, and this is so because HEAD Talks is a compliment the TED Talks series but is very much focused on community strength and vitality. Many of the videos posted right now involve videos of presentations from sustainability experts and other such knowledgeable presences, and these videos provide some very interesting insight on the field of sustainability.

As of recent, the HEAD Talks channel is starting to explore innovative ways of getting ideas out and animations are beginning to be part of the video collection. We have one animation posted right now, and another is currently in the works. Ultimately, the hope is to get a decent library of videos which will allow people to absorb the messages of sustainability and community development though a more visual method rather than solely through absorbing verbiage. So, a wide audience will be reached through this work.

The YouTube Channel can be found here:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/crcresearchRRU?blend=22&ob=5>

Social media is becoming the common language in our culture. Wide-scale messages are very much reliant on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc. The plan is to definitely involve our research further into these communication channels because this is a great way of reaching the public. A few decades ago, people would only check books or references that pertained to their interests, work, or studies. With social media, sustainability messages can essentially be put into the vein of social attention and get picked up without people actively seeking it. Very powerful communication stuff, and it is quickly becoming the way the world chats.

Ann Dale

I think also, Rob, our use of social media is experimenting with its use to communicate our research and scientific concepts. And, of course, we don't have a lot of money, so our thinking is that we will try and be 'at the edge'. We can't be slick, but we will try and be as innovative as possible. One of my general lessons in life is that by appealing to both the heart and the head, it moves people to greater action. And, now if we could only have great aesthetics.

Robert Newell

Absolutely, and the great thing about using modern social media is that it allows for a massive amount of experimentation. Many of these channels and communication methods are in a constant state of development to add new features and keep fresh and exciting to the populous. So, we have a lot of room for creativity. Which is good, because in all the work I've done in environmental education and communications, creativity has been key! New and interesting is a very appealing package for a message.

Yuill Herbert

Ann and Rob, what do you think of the relationship is between social media and sustainable development. Many "technologists" argue that technology is neutral and it is humans who use it for good or bad (forgive the black and white terminology). What do you think is the role of social media for sustainable development. Will it enhance or impede?

Robert Newell

In a way, I suppose I must come across as an advocate of social media because of the way I have been discussing it, but, in truth, I sort of view as the next natural step for communication. In a few decades, attempting to get sustainability messages across without the use of social media would be like trying to run an environmental agency that didn't have an e-mail address. It is important to know how people are communicating because we have a new generation that is growing to use these tools in the same manner we learned how to read or write. If it were ignored, than that would be a major communication gap between current and new generations.

Yuill Herbert

But, social media can distract, distort, and trivialize? Maybe or not?

Chris Ling

People said that about translating the bible into local languages, and also the invention of the printing press.

Robert Newell

Undoubtedly, since social media is an easy form of communication, anyone's opinion is fair game on many online channels. However, I did have an interesting conversation with someone about Bob Dylan's blog. He mentioned that for most of his career, the things he said and did on stage were always misinterpreted by the press and the general public never actually had the chance to hear from him until he could just write it himself. There is a danger with having everyone's whimsical thought being available, but also power in having the word come straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

Ann Dale

I once wrote that sustainable development was the key imperative of the 21st Century, I should have said its implementation is the key imperative. I now believe that the celebration of diversity, especially in the highly plural societies in which we now live, is a key imperative. And, as Lenore has noted, I am a more rural creature and I am deeply concerned about biological diversity. Leaving France and coming back to Canada, I

reflected upon how diversity contributes to communities, it seems to me, that those communities that have a diversity of built form, that allow for human expression of values, and different aesthetics, are the more interesting. Rebecca and Yuill, remember our workshop in Kingsburg, Nova Scotia and how diverse the housing was in that former fishing community, and yet missing social capital since many of the homes had been renovated by wealthy people in North America who lived there for only two weeks of the year. Yuill observed that perhaps what makes a community is the social capital, so it is fundamentally about reconciliation, regeneration and connection with one another(especially with other species).

How do we bring the wilderness back into the city? It is not out there, but could be in cities if we valued and planned for it. Redesign and new design(especially of the built environment) could go a long way to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and perhaps, reintroduce some natural aesthetics. Enough of my rant, I cannot tell you how privileged I have been to work with such fine younger scholars. One of my mentors taught me to always keep the young around, they will push you. Thank you one and all, any final comments before we close. I hope our audience has enjoyed our brainstorming.

Lenore Newman

Before we run out, I want to say I hope we all keep working together on these critical issues.

Chris Ling

I feel like a quote about the importance of elder wisdom would be appropriate here, but I can't think of one. I very much hope I can be part of the next five years.

Rebecca Foon

Thank you everyone. This dialogue has been a true pleasure!

Yuill Herbert

Here's a proposal. Maybe we can all meet in Kingsburg for a mini free school sometime.

Ann Dale

We will all meet in one year in Kingsburg, Nova Scotia, the old and the new. I am glad that Lenore and Chris are now considered to be old guys. Take care and may the collaboration continue in new ways as we explore the relationship between community vitality, innovation, and adaptive government. Stay tuned for the launch of the community vitality tool in September.

Good summer everyone, and take care!