



LINK Members' Congress 18 November 2009

The Environment and Economics - Report

LINK

LINK's Chair Ian McCall welcomed members and guests, reminded the gathering of Congress's purpose to explore a topic that is of overarching interest to the movement. A short review of the highlights of LINK's year was shown, followed by a [presentation on the report Prosperity without Growth?](#) from Phil Matthews, Acting Director of the Sustainable Development Commission Scotland.

Points noted following Phil's presentation included:

Scotland's water and air quality improvements are partly due to export of industry, partly better management.

SDC appears not to be pushing hard for reduction in energy use? With regard to energy production locally versus upgrading the grid, and energy efficiency, all approaches are needed. Resource cap? SDC would be happy to inquire into legal measures to respect biodiversity limits. For carbon there is the Climate Change Act, we now require tools and action across the board. There are no particular recommendations coming from SDC, it does not wish to separate out climate from sustainable development overall, although it has had discussions with the committee on climate change.

Should there be a happiness target? A key point is indicator(s) to measure it.

Redistribution of wealth is very important, more equal societies have better outcomes for health too.

How do we mainstream these ideas?

Surviving the recession

 Mike Robinson, RSGS & David Downie, WWFS

View the [presentation](#).

Discussion: There is a credit crunch, not a shortage of money. Funding has been drawn away from Scotland as a result of takeovers. Government funding corrupts and dependence on UK HQ for some NGOs is worrying eg Ramblers. We need an Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for Scotland.

Campaigning and lobbying cannot be funded in the same way, though in the longer term the donor base can be educated, eg Friends of the Lake District. Look at what has worked and share best practice, eg Borders Forest Trust.

There is a need to get some funds back for the environment – eg Aggregates fund went to the climate challenge fund. Other potential taxes – 1% for the planet. Also an issue that English and Welsh NGOs can access funds for nature conservation and environment not available in Scotland.

We need to be canner - influencing what funds are spent on.

It is a good time to promote membership, increasing for many organisations.

An Ideal Funder – would help cover salary costs and overheads, revenue costs, ability to campaign, do advocacy, awareness raising, public engagement, allow an organisation to carry on successful work without always having to dream up the new, or innovate.

It is useful to have a 2 stage process for applications.

Needs of sector include:

Historic Environment sector – infrastructure, skills support.

FoES -funding to invest and develop membership recruitment, staff time, development of the organisation.

Funding for biodiversity for its own sake!

Sharing resources, adding value - we are good at that. Keep the cohesion so that NGOs can compliment each other.

SEFF plans to collate what great value for money the ENGOs are.

Develop a strategy for upskilling, and get more stropky.

Economic value of health through environment. Katharine Taylor, Sustrans & Colin Howden, Transform Scotland

See the [presentation](#). Discussion focused on walking and cycling and the economic costs and benefits.

Ecosystem Services and the economy Tony King, Scottish Wildlife Trust

See the [presentation](#). Discussion below.

Engaging communities – some examples and issues. Eva Schonveld, Transition Towns, & Fran Loots, John Muir Trust

Eva introduced some of the ideas behind the transition movement, key being harnessing the enthusiasm of local people to make changes for themselves. Some key ideas lead from this;

- **Strongly expressed.** Working with peoples enthusiasm ie enthusiastic about food – then do food.
- **You want it done – you do it**
- Broad ambitious vision
- **Relevant** to peoples lives, meet problems
- **Trajectory** – visible products and manifestations.
- **Range** of ways that people can be involved.

JMT try to '*walk alongside*' the communities they work with. The 'green island' concept on Eigg was used as an inspirational example.

Potential for creative fundraising; community financing/shareholder investment schemes. Chris Cook, Nordic Enterprise Trust UK

See the [presentation on Partnership Finance](#) here. See additional presentation on [Energy Pooling](#), a new approach to community energy

Partnership Finance is an alternative model to banks for circulating value; electricity, rental, goods and services. There are some similarities to credit unions and to LETS, although generally there is an administrator to service the process. Chris saw potential for NGOs, particularly those with land, to work with communities on green energy partnerships.

Alternative Economic Indicators Jonny Hughes, SWT

[Presentation](#) here – see discussion below.

Volunteering and retraining. Jackie Brown, RSPB & Violet Dalton, NTS

[Supporting materials here.](#)

This was a masterclass in volunteer management. Volunteers are the greatest advocates for getting your organisation's message out. Include volunteers in the big picture action. Julia Duncan at [FEVA](#), the Forum for Environmental Volunteering Activity, has excellent resources and can deliver trainings.

Walk the walk and talk the talk. Davina Shiell, Friends of the Earth Scotland

[Presentation here](#)

This was an interactive presentation. Firstly the group brainstormed 'what is communication?' coming up with a long list of components. Davina then talked about brand, managing reputations, the importance of messaging and using the correct channels. It was then back in to pairs to discuss how our organisations used communications. Davina then moved on to talk about the importance of branding, and consistent branding. Davina noted later the importance of public communications and the tendency for policy activated organisations not to capture the public's imagination. Use plain English and leave out the jargon.

General Discussion chaired by John Mayhew.

The discussion group leaders reported briefly. On **health & environment**, we could work with communities to counter the appeal of greater speed, a driver for economic growth. LINK has collated members' work in relation to health and environment, and is working other organisations to make better linkages. As well as getting people more active there are issues of food, energy efficiency, damp housing, pollution of air and water. LINK has a delegate on the steering group of the Healthy Environment Network, an initiative of SEPA and HealthScotland.

The **Ecosystem Services** group had discussed how the movement should respond to the debate about putting prices on aspects of the environment, and how we can achieve our aims. No market value does not mean no value. Biodiversity does not feature and we must be careful not to let wider biodiversity be discounted. Some things must be protected for their own sake. We need to sharpen our communications to highlight where current economic system does not account for liabilities and externalities like the environment.

Engaging Communities group recognized that a longer time span is needed to engage with communities. There can be mutual benefit in lobbying, and in leveraging funding.

There was consensus in the **Alternative Economic Indicators** group that GDP needs to be modified or we need an alternative, and that we should be promoting it. There was no clarity on which alternative and it is difficult to campaign on something where we cannot offer an agreed solution.

One can look at the record of those backing proposed alternatives, eg Stiglitz is sensible and has a reasonable brief. This meeting agreed that the issue was of major concern to wider civic society in

Scotland and across Europe and that concerted effort to put forward an alternative is needed. LINK will pick up on references in its European monitoring for members and include it in its manifestos work.

Carbon is currently the only thing standing up to GDP and the environment sector must be careful not isolate itself or come up with something ill thought out. All political parties are interested in social cohesion and measuring wellbeing – the door is open while this is topical. It was relevant that SNH has commissioned work from John Hambrey to investigate credible compound indicators of environmental quality for Scotland which he felt would be useful to feed into an ongoing process.

There was recognition that if we want to raise our game on a sustainable economic system that effort needs to be focused on various fronts. The scarce resources of ENGOs are strained, and there is still depressing lack of joined up thinking despite years of rhetoric, eg in energy, and in the planning system. LINK's planning task force was successful in getting sustainable development into the consolidated Scottish Planning Policy; we won't know if will make a difference but it is a step forward to get it in there. It is even more important for LINK members to increase and improve cooperative working. We need to use the tools we have, fight totemic cases to keep public attention, and continue to speak up for benefits that are not of any monetary value. These discussions would help form LINK's forward planning meeting the following day.

Helen Zealley thanked everybody for their contributions and urged us all to read the books [Prosperity Without Growth?](#) and [The Spirit Level](#).

Acknowledgements

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 Thanks to the speakers – Phil Matthews, Davina Shiell, David Downie, Mike Robinson, Eva Schonveld, Fran Loots, Colin Howden, Katherine Taylor, Chris Cook, Tony King, Jonny Hughes, Violet Dalton, Jacky Brown, Ian McCall, Helen Zealley and Lloyd Austin.

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