

Greening the Economy, Greening Society: What is the Role of The EU? University of Surrey, 9-10/5/13

IAS Funded Workshop Report
Prof Alex Warleigh-Lack, 17 June 2013

1.0: Workshop Themes

One of the major questions facing humanity is how we can alter our economies and societies in order to adapt to the environmental crisis. Climate change and biodiversity loss reveal the unsustainability of our present economic and social models, and yet despite the on-going financial crisis, which could have opened up possibilities for radical change, a truly green economy remains a long way off. Controversy persists as to how an economy can be ‘greened’ to balance ecological, economic and social objectives, with ideas ranging from ecological modernisation (a minimalist response) through to challenging the taken-for-granted growth imperative (Jackson 2009). Moreover, despite the urgency and importance of the challenges we face, the language of the economic/environmental crisis has been neutralised so that some have even spoken of a post-sustainable development discourse where the emphasis has shifted to deconstructing the very meaning of ‘sustainable’ and denuding it of real content through application to a wide range of human endeavour (Morse, 2010). We thus still need to ask which societal and governance changes are required to facilitate and embed green economic transformations (Malcolm, 2011; Rätzl and Uzzell, 2011; 2012).

This multidisciplinary workshop addressed these pressing matters in the specific context of the EU. This choice of focus was made for several reasons. *First*, the EU is often considered to be the global leader in ‘green’ politics and action on climate change, which not only pushes for tougher environmental standards at the global level but also develops innovative means to address environmental problems. *Second*, EU policy influences over half a billion lives in the EU member states, plus millions more in neighbouring countries, through the process of Europeanisation, with further influence over a variety of trading partners including many in the Global South. *Third*, cross-border environmental problems require solutions at a supranational level, and the EU is the most advanced supranational structure that has so far been developed. And *fourth*, despite all this, the EU’s environmental principles ironically remain trapped in a silo, and its core policies – largely economic in nature – remain fundamentally ‘un-green’ (Warleigh-Lack, 2010).

The workshop therefore explored four core questions:

- What is a green economy?
- Why hasn’t the EU been more successful in ‘integrating’ its environmental policy principles into economic policy and regulation, despite certain successes?
- What role could and should the EU institutions play in a green economy? Who else should be involved, at which levels of governance, and how can they best be engaged?
- How could the EU help to make greening the economy accepted as a bonus for employment?

2.0: Workshop Summary

The workshop combined three different kinds of session to enable the free exchange of ideas. Plenary papers were presented by leading experts from a range of disciplines (politics, law, economics) and countries (Norway, Sweden, the UK, Ireland). Panels which grouped together themed papers were also organised, respectively on the issues of the contribution to ‘greening’ of EU law and regulation, and on the use of innovative environmental practices and principles. A plenary session by one of the leading practitioners in the field, Dr Mikael Karlsson, President of the European Environment Bureau, also took place.

This rich mix of papers was complemented by an unusual, and thus distinctive, aspect of the workshop: an innovative method of deliberation devised by two of the participants, Prof Stephen Morse, and his collaborator at the Open University, Prof Simon Bell. The process used to undertake this part of the workshop is called *Imagine*. Based on the soft systems approach to analysis and originally developed as a means to explore sustainability issues in a variety of conflictual contexts (Bell 2011; Bell and Morse 1999, 2012), the methodology is now well-tested and has also been applied in future studies around the use of the internet in the UK (Bell et al 2010). *Imagine* requires no lecturing or overt ‘teaching’; rather it is a process model which makes use of the natural flows of facilitated group-work process. It is deliberately designed to avoid glib cliché and false consensus. Rather, in a vigorous but engaging thought experiment the members of small groups gradually build up a shared understanding and feed this back to the wider group. In a form of fractal learning, the larger group then adopts the main themes agreed by the smaller groups and with this a rigorous understanding of the three realities (where we are, where we want to be and how we want to get there). This understanding can subsequently be used as a blueprint for agenda setting and activity planning. The *Imagine* process can be accomplished in three hours, and constituted the greater part of the workshop’s second day. It produced a fascinating range of insights and shaped participants’ plans for future cooperation.

The full workshop programme can be seen at: <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem>. Short interviews with some of the plenary speakers at the workshop are available at the same address, along with outputs from the *Imagine* workshop.

3.0: Workshop Outcomes

The workshop has generated several likely outputs.

3.1: Network construction

Participants at the workshop found the discussions and collaboration effective and stimulating; many of us have agreed to constitute an interdisciplinary research network, with the aim of securing funding for further collaboration. Initial members of the network will include the workshop co-organisers plus Stefanie Baasch (Kassell), Alicia Epstein (Leeds), Sanna Elfving (Surrey, Law), Adeline Johns-Putra (Surrey, English), Blanca Mamutse (Surrey, Law), Jan Maskell (Lancaster), Nora Rätzzel (Umeå), Beate Sjøfjell (Oslo), and Fred Steward (Policy Studies Institute/Westminster). The likely theme is *A Europe of Resilience: Myths, Policies and Behaviours for Change*.

The intended initial funders for the network are the ESRC seminar series and the EU's COST programme. It is intended to submit bids for funding over the course of the forthcoming academic year.

3.2: Publications

3.2.1: Think-tank report. One of the co-organisers, Prof Alex Warleigh-Lack, has been commissioned to write a report for the think-tank Green House on *Greening the EU*. This report will inform Green Party campaigning and policy in the 2014 European Parliament elections. The draft report is to be submitted in September 2013.

3.2.2: Academic publication. Several participants at the workshop have agreed to re-work their papers as part of an edited collection. This will take the form of either a special issue of a journal (most likely *Innovations*, which is an interdisciplinary journal with a core interest in environmental and European politics) or, should that prove impossible, an edited volume in a book series with a leading publisher. Earthscan, now owned by Routledge, is a likely contender in environmental politics and economics; leading publishers such as Routledge and Palgrave both have suitable series in EU affairs.

3.2.3: Blog post/Op-ed Piece. Alex Warleigh-Lack will co-author an op-ed piece with Dr Mikael Karlsson, President of the European Environment Bureau, who gave one of the plenary papers at the workshop. This piece will focus on what the EU could do today to green its economy, and will be aimed at the leading web-based news and comment sites in EU affairs: *EurActiv* and *EUObserver*.

4.0: Acknowledgements

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As always with CRonEM events, Mirela Dunic's tireless work was crucial to the success of the event; given that this was a joint event with the IAS, Mirela's contribution was even more significant. Hvala vam puno, Mirela!

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