



Sustainability and the Humanities: Shaping Culture and Community for a Changing World

Cardiff Humanities Research Institute, Cardiff University

Body, Health and Religion Research Group (BAHAR), Cardiff University

Date: Monday 10th May 2010, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Optometry Building, Cardiff University

Finding ways of living in viable ongoing relationship with our environment, including other human beings and societies, is the focus of growing attention across all aspects of public and private life. Our responses to challenges of sustainability, both in research development and related curriculum innovation, will be increasingly central to academic life in years to come.

As sustainability issues ripple through all aspects of human life, the Humanities have specific contributions to make, particularly in the cultural and community aspects of sustainability. This one-day CHRI conference and workshop has been organised to explore the implications of sustainability for the Humanities, and to address a range of intriguing and pressing questions in this area:

Where are the Humanities today in relation to the challenges of sustainability? What future directions could be emerging? What new opportunities might be grasped?

How do Humanities disciplines grapple with the complex processes of cultural, political, philosophical, religious and aesthetic change, to improve understanding about the futures we are creating?

What kinds of questions do we need to ask of the historical and cultural record, to deepen and to contextualise our understanding of sustainability and unsustainability?

How can researchers in the Humanities work together across institutional and knowledge boundaries, to support broader modes of understanding and to address the implications for teaching and learning?

As questions increase about the relevance and impact of academic research, can sustainability provide a central image and focus through which we can direct our work and relate it to the world around us?

This event seeks to involve a wide range of participants and to address several aims:

- To stimulate the research culture across Cardiff University, particularly within the Humanities Schools, with respect to questions of sustainability, in dialogue with the growing impetus to reorient university curricula to address sustainability issues.
- To connect academic development geared to sustainability with related education, learning and collaborative activities within the local and regional communities, drawing on the specific contributions of the Humanities Schools at Cardiff.
- To draw out possible avenues for future research, education and community projects that might improve sustainability prospects in our local region and the wider Welsh and UK contexts, in recognition of the planned establishment of a United Nations University Welsh Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development.

PROGRAMME

REGISTRATION AND COFFEE 10.00-10.20

Welcome: 10.20-10.30

Prof Geoffrey Samuel (Director, CHRI & BAHAR)
Welcome and housekeeping announcements

Opening Address: 10.30-11.00

Prof Daniella Tilbury (Professor of Sustainability, University of Gloucestershire)
Sustainability and the Humanities: Challenging Core Cultures

As the impulse to create more sustainable ways of life continues to gather pace, there is growing recognition worldwide that our educational systems will play a critical role in forging new pathways towards sustainability. Universities are ideally positioned to explore, model and lead innovation for sustainability, but this means rethinking academic practice and educational priorities at all levels. How can the humanities help to challenge and revitalise our cultures and our priorities for learning, discovery and application, to support such systemic changes?

Headline Presentation: 11.00-11.30

Dr Colin Brooks (Consultant, HE Academy ESD Project)
Critical Engagement: the Discipline of History and the Notion of Sustainability

Sustainability (and lack thereof) is not purely a current, nor purely a technical, issue. An understanding of sustainability through time, of the combination of cultural, political, economic and technical circumstances which went into making a development sustainable (or otherwise) is essential. The discipline of history has a central part to play in informing contemporary discussion. The last thirty years has seen the development of a new 'sub-field' - Environmental History. This talk will outline briefly the ways in which questions of sustainability which are central to Environmental History have come to assume a prominent place in historical research and teaching. It will consider the origins and the implications of such work and set that consideration in the context of the more general critical engagement of the Humanities with the idea of sustainability.

COFFEE 11.30-11.45

Headline Presentation: 11.45-12.15

Professor Justin Lewis (Head of School, School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University)
Part of the solution or part of the problem? The media and climate change

This presentation will consider the extent to which the media can support or hinder our responses to issues of sustainability and the environment such as the huge threat posed by climate change. This includes a discussion of the role played by the news media, communications and advertising industries. The aim will be to draw out the implications and possible trajectories for future scholarship in the media and communications subject areas.

DISCUSSION SESSION A 12.15-1.00

LUNCH 1.00-2.00

Headline Presentation: 2.00-2.30

Professor Barbara Adam, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University
Sustainability in Time: Challenges and Opportunities

Beginning with an overview of the link between sustainability and time, this presentation will consider the varied ways in which sustainability is anchored in historical approaches to the future. Our inability to bring sufficient reality to the futures we are creating for successor generations poses deep structural challenges. The contemporary quest to become more sustainable requires and enables openings for the forms of alternative knowledge practices. This is a task and a mandate for the human and social sciences over coming decades.

Headline Presentation: 2.30-3.00

Professor Geoffrey Samuel, School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff University
Sustainability at Global and Local Levels: Multiple Horizons for Development

A global perspective reveals the challenges of sustainable development and the forces that militate against justice and equity in human and environmental contexts. At the local level, academic study of the ways in which cultures are embodied in everyday life can stimulate more realistic understandings of development issues and more viable forms of response. The human and spiritual dimensions are central to any re-visioning of development processes that might adequately match these 'real-world' demands. This presentation takes up Barbara Adam's call for alternative knowledge practices and asks how the Humanities can contribute to bringing them into being

TEA & DISCUSSION SESSION B 3.00-3.45

FUTURE PLANNING 3.45-4.15

This discussion period is intended as an opportunity to take forward the agenda of the workshop by informing each other about existing activities and setting up future cooperation. Depending on numbers and level of interest, we suggest that we work in two or more groups. These might consist of the following:

- People interested in activities within the university system around future developments in academic research and teaching in Humanities and related disciplines
- People interested in activities within the community, particularly those focussing on Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and South Wales
- People concerned with the contributions of the humanities to education, learning and research for sustainability outside the university context.

PLENARY/CLOSE 4.15-4.30

The groups will report back to the meeting as a whole on planned activities and future plans. To close the meeting, three or four participants from differing perspectives (who will have been identified by the organisers in the course of the day) will summarise their impressions of the event, together with any further suggestions for future activities.