

Report on the 4th Meeting of the RSA Research Network on Sustainability Transitions in the Coastal Zone

Dates: Friday 12th April – Monday 15th April, 2019

Location: Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

About the Network:

Coastal areas, despite only occupying a relatively small percentage of the Earth's land-surface, provide more than one third of the globe's value of ecosystem services. Coastal areas are also increasingly at risk due to changing environmental conditions as well as human development pressures. These factors, coupled with the large-scale failure of contemporary governance approaches to direct development to more sustainable outcomes, present stark challenges for coastal stakeholders. Nowhere is this clearer than in contested coastal zones, where intense demand on coastal resources sits uneasily with stewardship, habitat protection and natural resource maintenance imperatives.

It is the aim of this research network to interrogate sustainability challenges in the coastal zone from the perspective of the emerging field of socio-technical transitions (SST) research. As described by Hansen & Coenen (2015) sustainability transitions are geographical processes, which rather than being universal and pervasive in nature, happen in situated, particular places and as Truffer and Coenen (2012) point out should be analysed in a regional context. However, much contemporary discussion of transition is either aspatial or based on implicit assumptions about spatial homogeneity, with comparatively little attention to how policy proposals will influence current patterns of uneven development (Bridge et al. 2013).

About Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick:

Mary Immaculate College was founded in 1898 for the professional education of primary school teachers. In addition to education studies, students were given scope to specialise in areas of particular interest to them from a range of Liberal Arts subjects offered by a number of departments. The BA in Liberal Arts was introduced to Mary Immaculate College in 1992 following the establishment of the link with the University of Limerick. There are currently 13 Departments within the faculty – Drama & Theatre Studies, English Language & Literature, French Studies, Gaeilge, Geography, German Studies, History, Mathematics and Computer Studies, Media and Communication Studies, Music, Philosophy, Psychology and Theology and Religious Studies.

About the Workshop:

Theme: Towards Coastal Resilience & Sustainability – Activating Coastal Transitions

Coastal zones represent a frontline in the battle for sustainability, as coastal communities face unprecedented economic challenges while coastal ecosystems are subject to overuse, loss of resilience and increased vulnerability. The move from top-down governance to a networked, co-owned model of governance will be explored for international coastal case-studies, with a view to developing understandings of best practice for coastal sustainability governance. This research workshop series has aimed to catalyse a discourse on new coastal economies, addressing problems of lock-in and system inertia in the current regime and exploring means to foster radical innovation for sustainable and resilience based coastal development all while making sure the spatial dimension and the regional context are fully conceptualized.

Attendees & Participants:

1. Cat Chambers; University Centre of the Westfjords, Iceland
2. Elena Lebedef, University Centre of the Westfjords, Iceland
3. Jamie Lee, University Centre of the Westfjords, Iceland
4. Kristin Weis, University Centre of the Westfjords, Iceland
5. Patrick Heidkamp; Southern Connecticut State University, USA
6. Michaela Garland; Southern Connecticut State University, USA
7. Stephen Axon; Southern Connecticut State University, USA
8. Samuel Vazquez, Southern Connecticut State University, USA
9. Miriah M. Kelly, University of Connecticut
10. Brian Marks; Louisiana State University, USA
11. John Morrissey, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland
12. Julian Bloomer, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland
13. Christina Kelly, Queens University of Belfast
14. Maria Pafi, Queens University of Belfast
15. Ryan Burger, NUI Galway
16. Eugene Farrell, NUI Galway
17. Liam Carr, NUI Galway
18. Laurie McIntosh, NUI Galway
19. Manon Defis, NUI Galway
20. Dearbhla Jordan, NUI Galway

Field Trip:

The workshop included a field trip to the west coast of Ireland to examine the coastal pressures and opportunities for blue growth in evidence in the west of Co. Clare. Stops included Lahinch Beach, Co. Clare, a coastal town which has recently had €2.85m of major coastal protection works green-lit for the promenade area of Lahinch seafront. This coastal protection effort is not without controversy, with certain stakeholders concerned with a lack of consultation and participation in the decision-making process. Some of the more adventurous members of the group braved the waters of the Atlantic and experienced the wonderful surf on offer in Lahinch Co. Clare. A tour of the visitor's center at the Cliffs of Moher¹, one of the most visited locations in Ireland with more than 1 million tourists annually focused the concept of sustainable tourism and workshop delegates got an opportunity to consider the challenges of managing large-scale tourism at an ecologically sensitive location. The fieldtrip also stopped at Poul nabrone Dolmen, the iconic dolmen or portal tomb located in the Burren, a site between 5000-7000 years old.

¹ <https://www.cliffsofmoher.ie/>

Presented Papers, Workshop Sessions & Themes:

- Energy Paradoxes: Lies, Damned Lies, and Offshore Renewables
Dr. Stephen Axon, Anya Chapman and Duncan Light
- Community Resilience & Food Security: The Case of Icelandic Fisheries
Dr. Catherine Chambers, University Centre Of The Westfjords, Iceland
- Critical Pragmatist Research in the Coastal Arena: The Green Wave Project
Prof Patrick Heidkamp, Southern Connecticut State University
- Coastal Communities and Climate Adaptation
Dr. Miriah M. Kelly, University of Connecticut
- Incorporating Geographical Concepts into the Blue Economy
Michaela Garland, Southern Connecticut State University
- Defining 'Coastal'
Ryan Burger, NUI Galway
- The future of coastal landscapes: Perceptions and conflicts on the west coast of Ireland
Maria Pafi, Queens University of Belfast
- Site Suitability Analysis for Sustainable Polyculture Aquaculture in Long Island Sound
Samuel Vazquez, Southern Connecticut State University
- Coastal Community Resilience: Iceland
Elena Lebedof, University Centre Of The Westfjords, Iceland
- *Saccharina latissimi* – Aquaculture, Kelp & Coastal Sustainability
Jamie Lee, University Centre Of The Westfjords, Iceland
- Uneven Transitions and Low Carbon Blue Economies
Dr. Brian Marks, Department of Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University
- Enablers & Barriers to Resilience Building in Coastal Communities (Keynote Session)
Dr. Eugene Farrell, School of Geography and Archaeology, NUI Galway
- Transformative Governance for Transition in Marine and Coastal Zones
Dr. Christina Kelly, Queens University of Belfast

Delegates discussed coastal transitions in a broad-ranging, inclusive and thought-provoking series of discussions and mini-workshops.

Sustainability Transitions in the Coastal Zone

The importance of participation emerged as a key focus of debate, particularly with regard to informed and engaged community-based responses to coastal pressures. Delegates were interested in how participation imperatives would endure resource, environment and political pressures in the coming decades. An argument on how farming narratives and big ideas for coastal sustainability related to one another, inter-linked and were perhaps compatible or not provided fruitful ground for productive brainstorming. As with previous workshops, issues of governance and justice and cross-cutting themes of gender and intersectionality emerged as being of particular interest and in need of more in-depth, transdisciplinary and place-based research investigation. The scope for developing a practice-focused and case-study based edited volume to follow up on work published in *Heidkamp, C. (Ed.), Morrissey, J. (Ed.). (2018). Towards Coastal Resilience and Sustainability. London, Routledge* was discussed.